THE MARVEL MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE-FICTION / AUGUST 1982 / $2.50 - 1£ U.K.

epic™

ILLUSTRATED

this issue:
WEIRDWORLD
the final
chapter

also:
RITES OF SPRING
by Arthur Suydam

plus:
GRAIL
by Michael
Saenz

0 71486 02620 08

epic ILLUSTRATED

AUGUST 1982 VOL. 1, NO. 13

CONTENTS

Overview/Page 6
notes on stories and contributors

Weirdworld: Conjurations of Crystal/Page 9
life's last stand in the land of the dead
story by Doug Moench; art by John Buscema and Marie Severin; painting by Steve Oliff

In the Heart of the City/Page 24
intense heat and unbearable pressure give rise to a cool beauty
story by Margaret Gallagher; art by James Romberger

Rites of Spring/Page 27
nothing can flourish and grow as quickly as carefully nurtured hate
story & art by Arthur Suydam

Bladerunner: Film into Comic/Page 35
a behind the scenes look at the adaptation of a major new s-f adventure
article by Archie Goodwin; art by Al Williamson and Carlos Garzon

Abraxas and the Earthman: Last Supper/Page 42
at the captain's table, a feast of fools
story & art by Rick Veitch

Topaz/Page 52
he who sets his sights too high may find his aim is off
story & art by Carl Potts

Fantasy between the Covers/Page 54
a sampling of the illustrated book scene
article by Jo Duffy

Survival/Page 59
food for thought on the subject of betrayal
story & art by Pepe Moreno

Gameview/Page 75
theology in the art of the gamester
review by Steven Grant

Grail/Page 76
in the quest for virtue, a man may lose what he set out with
story by Archie Goodwin; art by Mike Saenz

Mediaview/Page 89
for some film fans, yesterday is now
review by Dennis O'Neil

Feedback/Page 91
reader reaction to our eleventh issue

Cover/Mike Saenz
painting ©1982 Mike Saenz

EPIC ILLUSTRATED™ is published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016. James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Published bi-monthly. Copyright© 1982 by MARVEL COMICS GROUP. A Division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Vol. 1, No. 13, August, 1982 issue. Price $2.50 per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $15.00 for 6 issues in the U.S. $16.00 Canada. $17.00 Foreign. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. All business inquiries should be addressed to Ed Shukin, V.P. of Circulation, 10th floor. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the United States of America. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or marking removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Publisher disclaims all responsibility to return unsolicited editorial matter. Letters to EPIC ILLUSTRATED or its editors become the property of the magazine and are assumed intended for publication and republication in whole or part, and may therefore be used for those purposes. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission from Marvel Comics Group and the individual copyright holders. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016

SYNOPSIS

Somewhere in the endless heavens, a cosmic game is being played, an eternal contest between the champions of Light and Darkness. The shifting of the various pieces across the great chessboard, their gains and losses, are reflected in the lives of those who dwell in Weirdworld, the strange and wondrous land beneath.

A few of those whose lives have been touched by the game of the gods are:

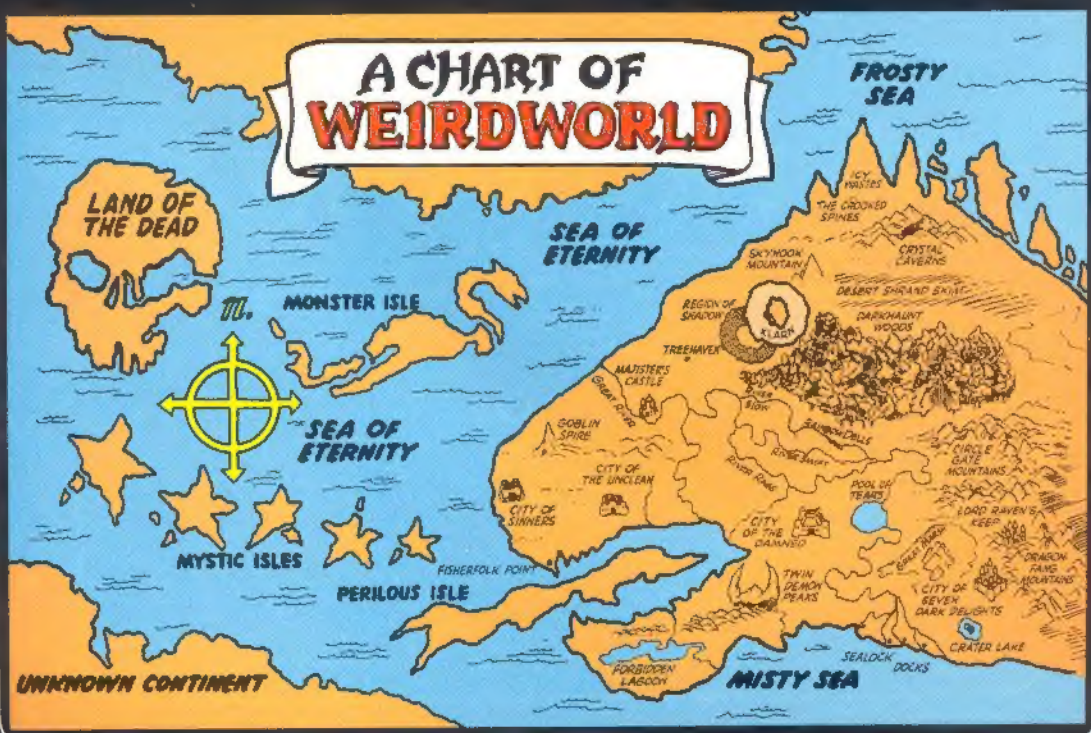
Tyndall and *Velanna*—a pair of innocent elves who long to return to their home, the floating island of Klarn, and who have no memory beyond the recent past.

Mud–Butt the dwarf—their loyal and irascible companion.

Lianissa—a wizard whose powers and life–force are rapidly fading—and her beloved, *Wulfbuck*—wielder of the sword of Glorywand.

Black Majister and his henchman, *Murkandor*—a pair of evil sorcerers secretly working to gain control of Velanna, for they believe that she and Tyndall are somehow crucial to the fate of Weirdworld.

Now, aided by the dragons of Klarn, immense beasts over which Tyndall has shown an instinctive and inexplicable mastery, the heroes must find Black Majister and recover the great crystal shield of Klarn, an artifact which he has stolen. If they fail, Majister will use the shield's power to tip the balance of the cosmic game in favor of Darkness—forever.

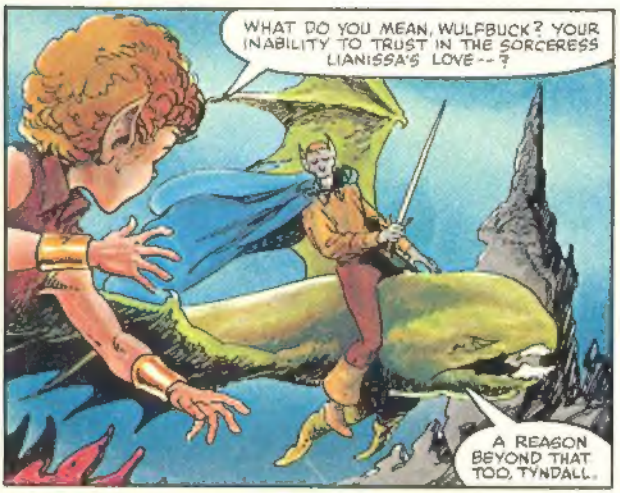


PART 4 CONJURATIONS OF CRYSTAL
YOU'VE CHANGED, TYNDALL OF KLARN, ASTRIDE YOUR BEAST, RED SORYLL. YOU'VE SOMEHOW BEEN GRANTED A MEASURE OF MATURITY--AND THE AUTHORITY TO COMMAND.
HE'S JUST A SHOW-OFF, IF YOU ASK ME.
OF COURSE I'VE CHANGED! IT'S A GREAT DAY--THE BEST OF MY LIFE! COME ON--THE DRAGONS WON'T HURT YOU!
WE'LL SOAR BEYOND THE WIND--AND ONCE YOU TASTE THE FEELING OF POWER ON A DRAGON'S BACK, YOU'LL KNOW WE CAN'T LOSE AGAINST BLACK MAJISTER!
THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, TWIT--YOU'RE A BORN DRAGON-MASTER! BUT WHAT ABOUT A COMMON DWARF LIKE ME, WHO'S AFRAID OF DRAGONS AND HEIGHTS?!
COME ON, WULFBUCK! YOU'VE CHANGED TOO--WITH GLORYWAND IN YOUR HAND, YOU'VE GOT NEW CONFIDENCE! YOU LOOK LIKE A REAL HERO!

©1982 Marvel Comics Group

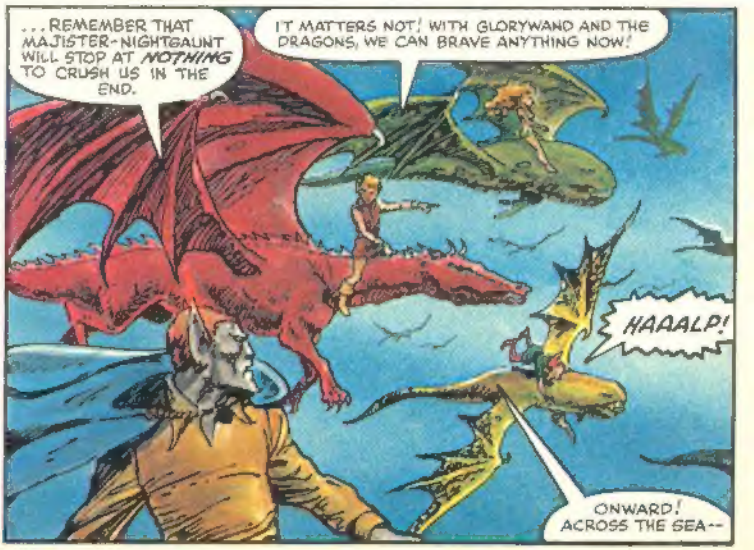
AYE, BUT LET US NOT FALL PREY TO OUR OWN PRIDE, FOR THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON -- BEYOND MY LOSS OF CONFIDENCE -- WHICH CAUSED ME TO FAIL IN MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH BLACK MAJISTER...

HURRY, MUD-BUTT! YOUR DRAGON IS WAITING!
YEAH -- BUT TO DO *WHAT?*


WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WULFBUCK? YOUR INABILITY TO TRUST IN THE SORCERESS LIANISSA'S LOVE -- ?
A REASON BEYOND THAT TOO, TYNDALL.

YOU SEE, I ENTERED THE FIRST COMBAT UNAWARE THAT MAJISTER IS ACTUALLY *NIGHTGAUNT*, A DARK GOD COME DOWN IN MORTAL GUISE...
WHOA!!

WHAT -- ? THEN THE DARK GODS ARE *CHEATING* IN THEIR LOUSY GAME! NO WONDER THEY'VE STARTED TO WIN!
AYE, AND NO MATTER HOW MUCH OUR OWN POWERS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN RESTORED...


...REMEMBER THAT MAJISTER-NIGHTGAUNT WILL STOP AT *NOTHING* TO CRUSH US IN THE END.
IT MATTERS NOT! WITH GLORYWAND AND THE DRAGONS, WE CAN BRAVE ANYTHING NOW!
HAAALP!
ONWARD! ACROSS THE SEA --

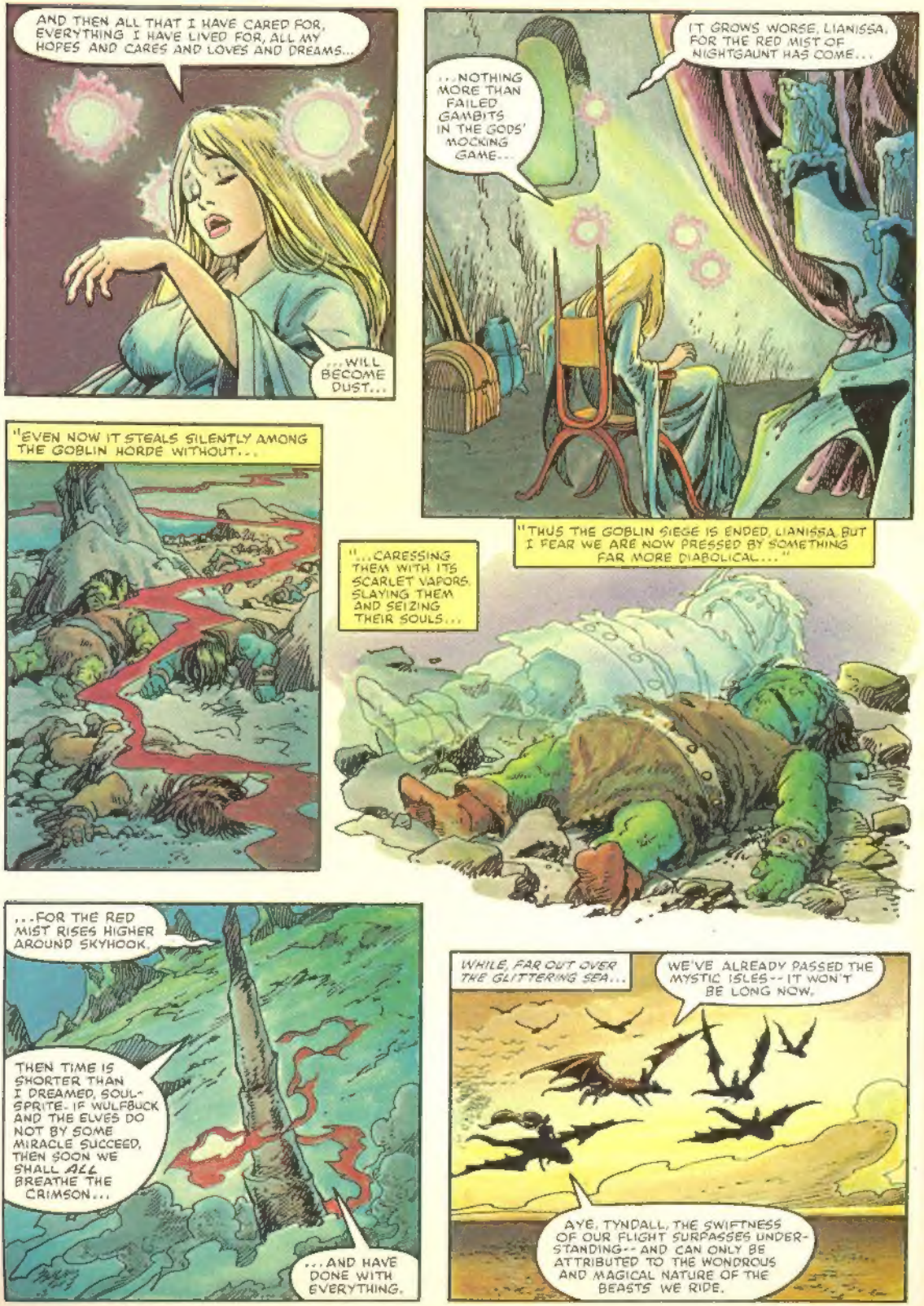
"--TO THE FOUL HAUNT OF MAJISTER-NIGHTGAUNT, IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD!"
FOCUS MY POWER, CRYSTAL SHIELD OF DARKNESS...

BRING TO ME THE SOULS OF THE DEAD GOBLIN HORDE, THEY WHO HAVE FALLEN UNDER THE BREATH OF MY CRIMSON MIST...
TRANSPORT THEM ACROSS THE VAST SEA AND DELIVER THEM INTO MY THRALL--

--HERE, WHERE THEY MAY BE STORED DEEP IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD...

EXCELLENT! SOON I'LL HAVE AN ARMY OF DEATH THAT *NO ONE* CAN DEFEAT, NOT THE GODS OF LIGHT ABOVE NOR ANYONE ON WEIRDWORLD HERE BELOW...NOT THE ELVES, NOR WULFBUCK, NOR EVEN--

"--THE PALE LIANISSA, SHE WHO IS THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN."
HEED ME, SOUL-SPRITES... MY METAPHYSICAL JOURNEY TO WULFBUCK IN THE TAVERN HAS WEAKENED ME BEYOND KEN... NOW I CANNOT EVEN RISE, AND STILL THE EVIL GROWS, WEAKENING ME FURTHER AS IT FEEDS ON MY STRENGTH...
IF MY LOVER WULFBUCK AND THE ELVES FAIL... MY LIFE WILL PASS ON TO THE HIGHER PLANE...


AND THEN ALL THAT I HAVE CARED FOR, EVERYTHING I HAVE LIVED FOR, ALL MY HOPES AND CARES AND LOVES AND DREAMS...
...WILL BECOME DUST...
...NOTHING MORE THAN FAILED GAMBITS IN THE GODS' MOCKING GAME...
IT GROWS WORSE, LIANISSA, FOR THE RED MIST OF NIGHTGAUNT HAS COME...
"EVEN NOW IT STEALS SILENTLY AMONG THE GOBLIN HORDE WITHOUT...
"THUS THE GOBLIN SIEGE IS ENDED, LIANISSA, BUT I FEAR WE ARE NOW PRESSED BY SOMETHING FAR MORE DIABOLICAL..."
"...CARESSING THEM WITH ITS SCARLET VAPORS, SLAYING THEM AND SEIZING THEIR SOULS...
...FOR THE RED MIST RISES HIGHER AROUND SKYHOOK.
THEN TIME IS SHORTER THAN I DREAMED, SOUL-SPRITE. IF WULFBUCK AND THE ELVES DO NOT BY SOME MIRACLE SUCCEED, THEN SOON WE SHALL ALL BREATHE THE CRIMSON...
...AND HAVE DONE WITH EVERYTHING.
WHILE, FAR OUT OVER THE GLITTERING SEA...
WE'VE ALREADY PASSED THE MYSTIC ISLES -- IT WON'T BE LONG NOW.
AYE, TYNDALL, THE SWIFTNESS OF OUR FLIGHT SURPASSES UNDERSTANDING -- AND CAN ONLY BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE WONDROUS AND MAGICAL NATURE OF THE BEASTS WE RIDE.

THEY ARE TRAVELLING FASTER THAN THEY SEEM TO BE, WULFBUCK, AND ALTHOUGH I HAVE NO MEMORY OF EVER BEING ON A DRAGON BEFORE, THIS FEELING -- THE EXULTATION OF SURGE AND SWOOP AND GLIDE -- IS FAMILIAR TO ME, AS IF I'D FELT IT LONG AGO, IN A DREAM.
I WISH YOU'D STAYED ASLEEP, TWIT. IS MY HEART STILL BEATING?
ALMOST FORGOTTEN IN THE WILD EXHILARATION IS VELANNA...
...SHE WHO NOW MURMURS QUIETLY IN RESPONSE TO AN UNHEARD VOICE...
YES, I KNOW -- THE TIME DRAWS NEAR. I WON'T FAIL.
BUT IN TRUTH SHE SPEAKS TO MAJISTER'S SERVANT MURKANDOR, THROUGH THE HOLLOW GLASS STATUE NOW COMPLETELY FILLED WITH BLACKNESS...
JUST REMEMBER THAT YOUR SOUL BELONGS TO MY MASTER, THE ELF TYNDALL MEANS NOTHING TO YOU. HE SEEKS TO DESTROY US, AND SO HE MUST BE DESTROYED. WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, DO NOT HESITATE.
I HEAR YOU, MURKANDOR. I WILL NOT FAIL.
AND, IN THE BARREN LAND OF THE DEAD...
NOW! NOW THAT THE LAST OF THE GOBLIN SOULS HAS BEEN IMMERSED IN THE BOSOM OF THIS DEAD SOIL--
--IT IS TIME TO EMPLOY THE KLARN SLEEP-CRYSTAL FOR THE OPPOSITE OF ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE...

...TO CATCH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN AND TURN IT BLACK...
...TO FOCUS ITS DISMAL, DARK RADIANCE UPON THE TORMENTED GROUND...UNTIL IT SEEPS DOWNWARD, QUESTING, QUESTING...
...AND FINALLY AWAKENS MY VAST ARMY OF THE DEAD FROM THEIR NOT-SO-ETERNAL SLEEP...
...DRESSING THEM AGAIN IN FLESH...
...THE CORRUPT FLESH OF DARKNESS AND DEATH!
WE COME, LORD AND MASTER!
WE AWAIT YOUR COMMANDS, BLACK MAJISTER!
AND WE SHALL OBEY, LORD NIGHTGAUNT!
AT SKY-HOOK, THE RED MIST RISES.
IT MOVES IN STATELY SWIRLS, WEARY AND DREAMLIKE, MUCH LIKE A DANCE AT SOME WEIRD AND DECADENT BALL...
...THE FINAL DANCE OF A LONG AND LONELY NIGHT.
THE GOBLIN BODIES HAVE DISAPPEARED, LIANISSA...AND THE MIST STILL LICKS TOWARD US.
THEN NIGHTGAUNT'S ARMY HAS ARISEN ...AND HE CAN NOW AFFORD TO GIVE MY DEATH TO THE OTHER SIDE.

HEAR ME, MY ARMY! YOUR LORD COMMANDS! SOON WE SHALL FIGHT OUR FINAL BATTLE ON THIS PLANE--AND WE FIGHT FOR NEITHER TERRITORY NOR TREASURE! WE LUST FOR ONE PRIZE ALONE!
WE LUST FOR RIVERS OF BLOOD AND SHOALS OF BONES! WE LUST FOR THE SWIFT DEALING OF DEATH AND DEATH ALONE!
YOU NEED FEAR NOTHING, FOR YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD! YOU STAND WITH ONE FOOT IN THE HIGHER PLANE EVEN NOW, AND THE FORCES OF LIFE HOLD NO DREAD FOR YOU! WE CANNOT BE STOPPED! WE CAN ONLY CONQUER!
AND ONCE WE HAVE CONQUERED THE ENTIRE WORLD AND CONVERTED IT TO THE FORCES OF DARKNESS, THEN WILL THE STAGE BE SET FOR THE SUPREME BATTLE BEYOND ALL BATTLES...
...THE FINAL CLASH OF THE HIGHER PLANE--THE WORLD-ENDING WAR OF THE GODS!
THE LAND OF THE DEAD, WULFBUCK--AT LAST! BUT ITS SURFACE--ITS FACE--SEEMS TO BE CRAWLING WITH MOVEMENT...SHIFTING...WRITHING...
...AS IF THE SKULLFACE HAS TAKEN ON FLESH AND COME ALIVE!
AYE, TYNDALL--BUT ONLY A MOCKERY OF LIFE.
YOU MEAN...
YES! I CAN SEE--THE GOBLIN RAIDERS--AND THEY...THEY'RE DEAD.
AGAIN SOMETHING PASSES BEHIND TYNDALL'S EYES, CLOUDING THEM WITH VISIONS FROM ELSEWHERE...
OHH...MY HEAD...MY STOMACH! HAVE I FALLEN OFF YET?
ILLIANOR! HEPHESTIUS ILLIANOR! ILLIANOR!
OH, NO...! NOW THE TWIT'S SINGING AGAIN!
BUT THE STRANGE CROONING SWIFTLY FADES...

LET US HOPE THE POWER OF LANISSA'S SOUL INFUSED IN MY BLADE WILL THIS TIME BE EQUAL TO THE TASK
I WILL WULFBUCK - I KNOW IT
AND NOW-- DOWN RED SORYL ATTACK!
YAOWWW! THIS S T - I THINK I'M GONNA BE SICK
THE MOMENT DRAWS NEAR - I MUST BE READY
THOSE SHADOWS... WHAT? A DRAGON ARMADA! WULFBUCK AND THE ELVES- SO SOON!
PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR THE FIRST PASS MY ARMY!
BELCHING FLAME AND SLICING THE SKY FROM GOLDEN SUN TO BARREN GROUND THE DRAGONS ATTACK
WULFBUCK TIGHTENS HIS GRIP ON GLORY HAND AND STEPS HIGHER ASTRIDE HIS MOUNT
AND THE DEAD THINGS WHICH ONCE WERE GOBLINS BEGIN TO LAUGH

ADRIFT IN THE ERUPTING CHAOS MAELSTROM - NIGHTGAUNT TURNS TO FACE AN OLD ENEMY
GLORYWAND - WHOLE AGAIN!
AYE, DEMON -- AND SOON TO BE TEMPERED IN YOUR BLACK BLOOD EVEN YOU FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR FOR THE STRENGTH OF MY UNION WITH LIAN-SSA!
AND THE ELF TYNDALL HAS PROVEN TO BE A DRAGON-MASTER, HIS ANCIENT POWERS AWAKENED BY YOUR OWN FOUL SCHEME!
SO YOU SEE DARK GOD THE DRAGONS WHICH YOU HOPED WOULD WORK PETTY MISCHIEF SHALL PROVE TO BE YOUR DOWN FALL -- YOUR OWN EVIL COMING BACK TO HAUNT YOUR FINAL DEFEAT
PERHAPS WULFBUCK
BUT EVEN IF THE BLADE IS AGAIN WHOLE YOU ARE NOT!
AM I RIGHT BEAST-MAN?
YOU GAVE ME A MERE MASK - I AM THE SAME BENEATH!
AND USE THE KLARN SLEEP-CRYSTAL AS A SHIELD IF YOU WILL NIGHTGAUNT BUT THE MAN WITHIN ME WILL THIS TIME BE STOPPED BY NOTHING!
KLANG
BUT NO CRACK MARS THE PERVERTED DISC AS GLORYWAND SLAMS UPON ITS DARKLY GLISTENING FACE
INSTEAD
HAH YOU ARE A FOOL WULFBUCK AND SO EASY TO DECEIVE THE CRYSTAL IS MORE THAN A SHIELD - IT IS A WEAPON!
SEE HOW THE POWER OF YOUR BLADE IS ABSORBED AND REFLECTED BACK UPON YOU!
SEE HOW THAT POWER SEIZES GLORYWAND ITSELF AND FORCES IT TO YOUR THROAT!
NO GOT TO FIGHT IT, - HOLD IT BACK
CAN'T LET YOU TURN MY ONE STRENGTH AGAINST ME!

LESS THAN A DOZEN PACES FROM WULFBUCK'S STRUGGLE, THE GOBLIN ZOMBIES RESPOND WITH BOW AND ARROW TO THE WITHERING ATTACK OF THE LEVIATHANS . .
RIDERLESS DRAGONS ARE HIT.
THEY PLUMMET PINWHEELING TO THE HARD GROUND. .
. . WHERE AWAITS SAVAGE LAUGHING DEATH
THEN TYNDALL TOO, SPIES A FORMER ENEMY . .
SHREEKAR! THE GOBLIN CHIEFTAIN!
YOU! THE PIT FUL ELF SO SMALL WHO STOLE SHREEKAR'S FEMALE FLESH NOT-FOR COOKING YOU ARE THE CAUSE OF ALL THIS
HAD I STOPPED YOU FROM REACHING THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN I WOULD STILL LIVE FOR MANY HOT COLD CHANGES TO COME! BUT I VOWED THE SCORE WOULD BE SETTLED IN DEATH- DEATH- AND SO IT SHALL!
BRAVE WORDS FROM A WALKING PIECE OF DEATH HIMSELF, SHREEKAR! BUT IF YOU WANT THE SCORE SETTLED I'M HARDLY RUNNING THIS TIME!
JUST AS YOU'VE FOUND A CHANGE IN DEATH, I'VE FOUND A NEW LIFE BEYOND MY OLD ONE!
AND, ACROSS THE SEA, WHERE MURKANDOR STILL LURKS IN MAJISTER'S CHAMBERS
NOW CAPTIVE ELF!
THE TIME IS NOW!!

COME ON SHREEKAR, I'M READY FOR--!
YES--NOW! I HEAR YOU-- THE TIME IS NOW!
WHAT THE--? VELANNA! YOU RE ATTACKING ME?!
STILL THE SHIELD-SORCERY FORCES GLORYWAND BACK EVER NEARER THE THROAT OF WULFRUCK
YOU ARE DOOMED, BEAST-MAN!
DO YOU HEAR ME, NOBLE ONE?! SOON THE STRENGTH OF YOUR UNION WITH THE WIZARD LIANISSA WILL BE SHATTERED--
"--BECAUSE EVEN NOW LANISSA BREATHES THE FIRST RED VAPORS OF DEATH
THE FIVE ENCHANTED GLOBES. MY SOUL-SPHERES OVERCOME BY THE CRIMSON
RED SORYLL DIPS, EVEN AS HIS SISTER DRAGON BUCKS AT THE DEMENTED ELF THING ON HER BACK- AND THE COMBINED MOVEMENT PRESERVES THE SAFETY OF KLARN'S SOLE REMAINING DRAGONMASTER
. AND . AND NOW, AS I FADE FROM MY FAILED STATION. AND FROM EVERY HOPE AND FEAR I EVER DARED DREAM.
. IT IS TIME, FOR ME TO BREATHE MY . AST
VELANNA YOU . YOU ALMOST SLASHED OFF MY HEAD!!

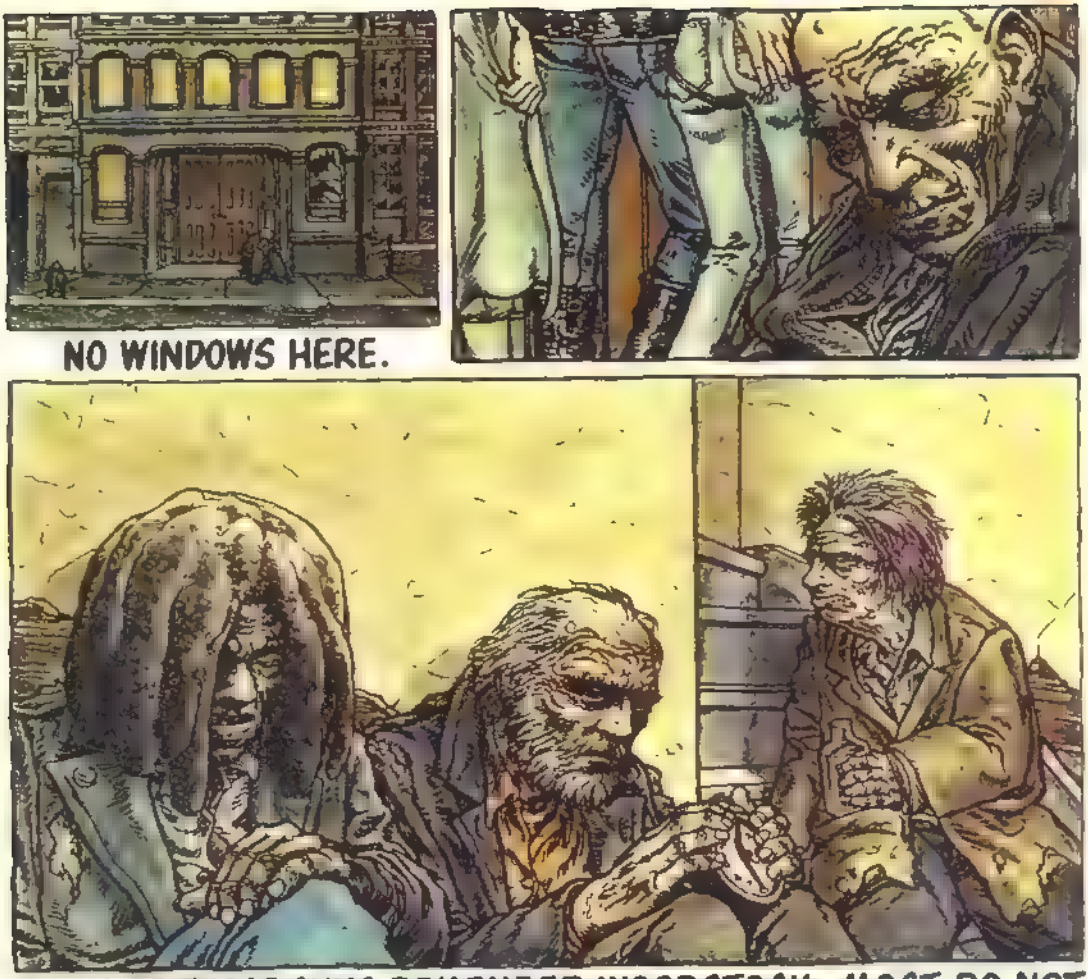
TRUE DAY HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN TO SHINE ON THE LAND OF THE DEAD BUT NOW AS AN IDLE GAME OF THE GODS YEARS TO END NO NIGHT HAS EVER REIGNED BLACKER OR MORE CRUELLY
HOLD STILL YOU STUPID BEAST! LET ME DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!
NO VELANNA, STOP! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND--? YOUR DRAGON WILL NOT ATTACK ME-- IT WOULD SOONER DESTROY YOU!
GET OFFA ME YA STINKIN DEAD-THINGS, BY THE DWARF MOTHER'S HAIRY TEAT-- IF I STILL HAD MY TRUSTY POWER-ROD I'D TEACH YA A THING OR TWO ABOUT BEIN DEAD.
NUMBER ONE-- YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LIE DOWN AND BE STILL!

NO GLORY WAND. I WIELD YOU - I AM YOUR MASTER -- YOU MUST NOT SLAY ME!
STRUGGLE NO MORE YOU PITIFUL MORTAL FOOLS.
IN ONE SWEEPING MOMENT OF BLACK MAJESTY I SHALL PUT AN END TO ALL YOUR TERROR, ALL YOUR WOES - AYE AND ALL YOUR HOPE ALL YOUR ECSTASY!
YOU HAVE BUT TO YIELD!

WEIRDWORLD continues on page 83

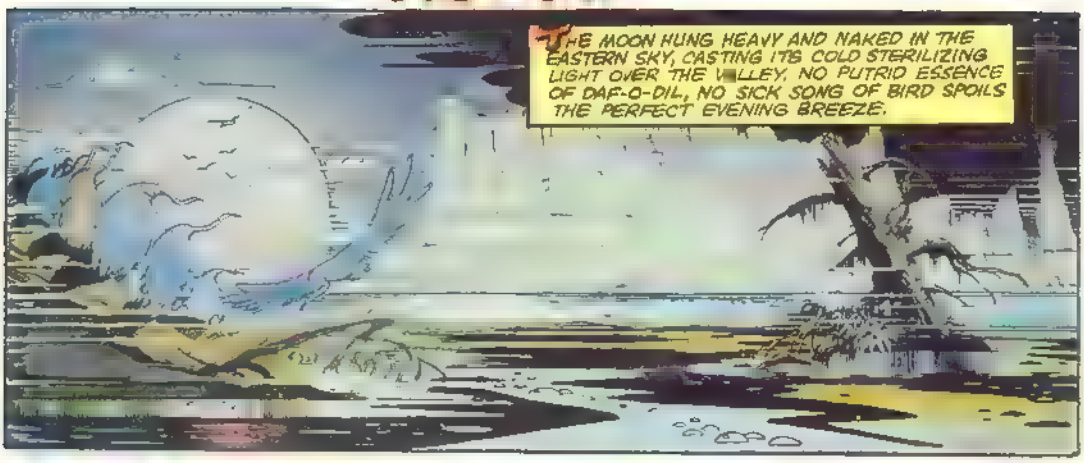
THE HEART OF THE CITY
STORY BY MARGARET GALLAGHER
ART BY JAMES ROMBERGER
IT IS A HOT AFTERNOON.
TRASH WHISPERS, AND PUNKS SHOW CUBE TRAYS TO THE GALS.
PUNKS ARE VICIOUS AND KILL 'MOST EVERY DAY.

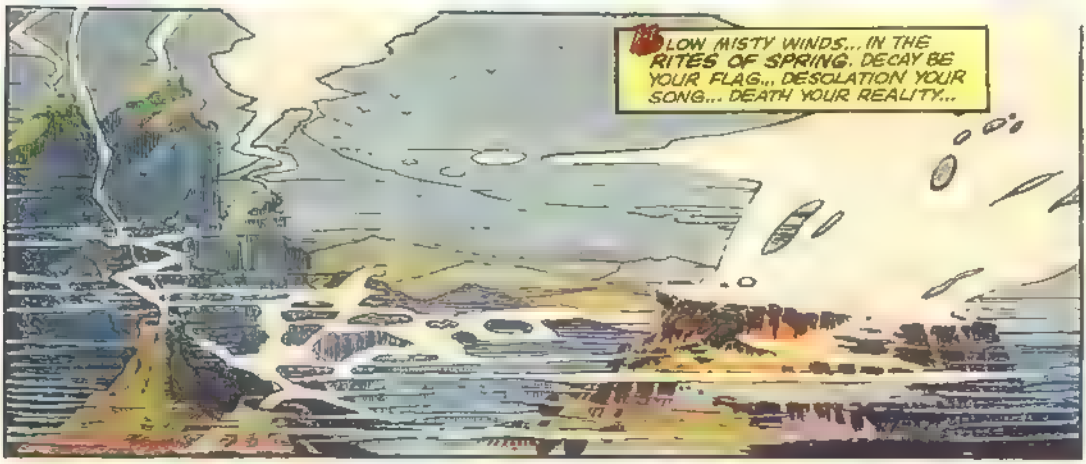
Story © 98 Margaret Gallagher Art © 98 James Romberger

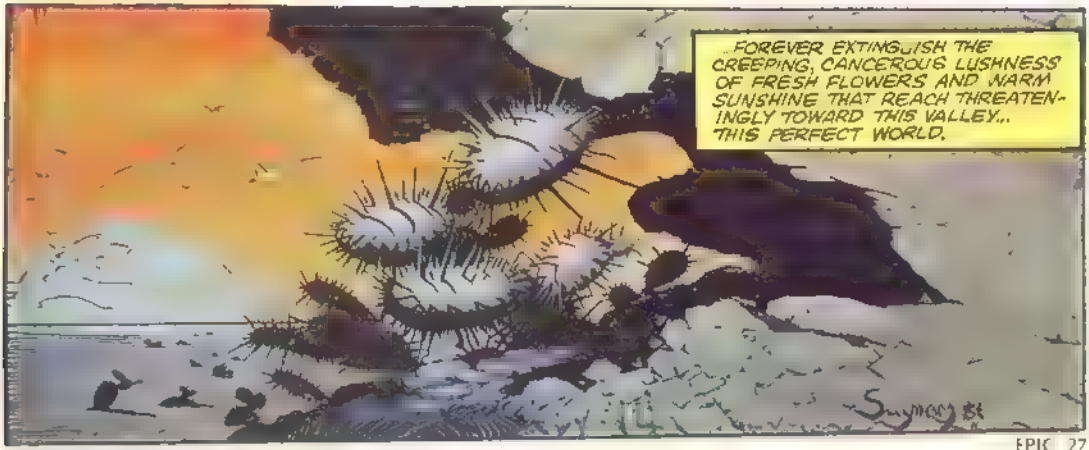

NO WINDOWS HERE.
SOME OF THESE GUYS REMEMBER WOODSTOCK. MOST DO NOT.
AND YET, HERE... IN THE DECAY AND DISARRAY... JUST UP HERE...

IN THE HEART OF THE CITY.

PROLOGUE:


THE MOON HUNG HEAVY AND NAKED IN THE EASTERN SKY, CASTING ITS COLD STERILIZING LIGHT OVER THE VALLEY. NO PUTRID ESSENCE OF DAF-O-DIL, NO SICK SONG OF BIRD SPOILS THE PERFECT EVENING BREEZE.




...FOREVER EXTINGUISH THE CREEPING, CANCEROUS LUSHNESS OF FRESH FLOWERS AND WARM SUNSHINE THAT REACH THREATENINGLY TOWARD THIS VALLEY... THIS PERFECT WORLD.

©1982 Arthur Suydam

LOW BRIDGE,
FLYTRAP' DAT GOOK IN THERE IS STILL KICKIN' AN' HE GOT PLENTY'A AMMO!
TMNNHHHMMMNNP!
LOOK LIKE WE GONNA HAFTA SMOKE HIS ASS OUT!
HERE, FLYTRAP... TAKE A HIT ON THIS!
PUFF-PUFF PUFF!
HEY, GOOK! HEY, YOU IN THERE!

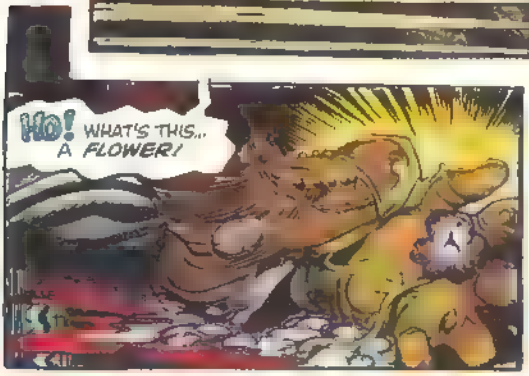
YEH WHAT YA WANT?
IF YA SURRENDERS PEACEFUL LIKE AN' SAYS UNCLE LIKE A GOOD GOOK I'LL GIVE YA SOME'A THIS ASS-KICKIN' GOOD POT I GOT HERE!
SNIF SNIF SNIF!
OKAY! I IS COMIN' OUT ACCORDIN' TO TH' LIV N' LAW SET DOWN BY DASH #4 OF TH' GEE-NEE-YAH CODE!
YOU... UH.. YOU PROMISES T'GIMME SOME POT WHEN I COMES OUT...?
CROSS MY HEART AN' HOPE T'DIE!
OKAY! HERE I AM! WHERE MY REEFER?
PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA!
KLIK KLIK KLIK KLIK KLIK KLIK
ARG!

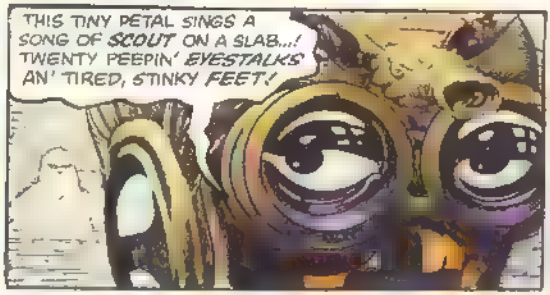
by ARTHUR Suydam

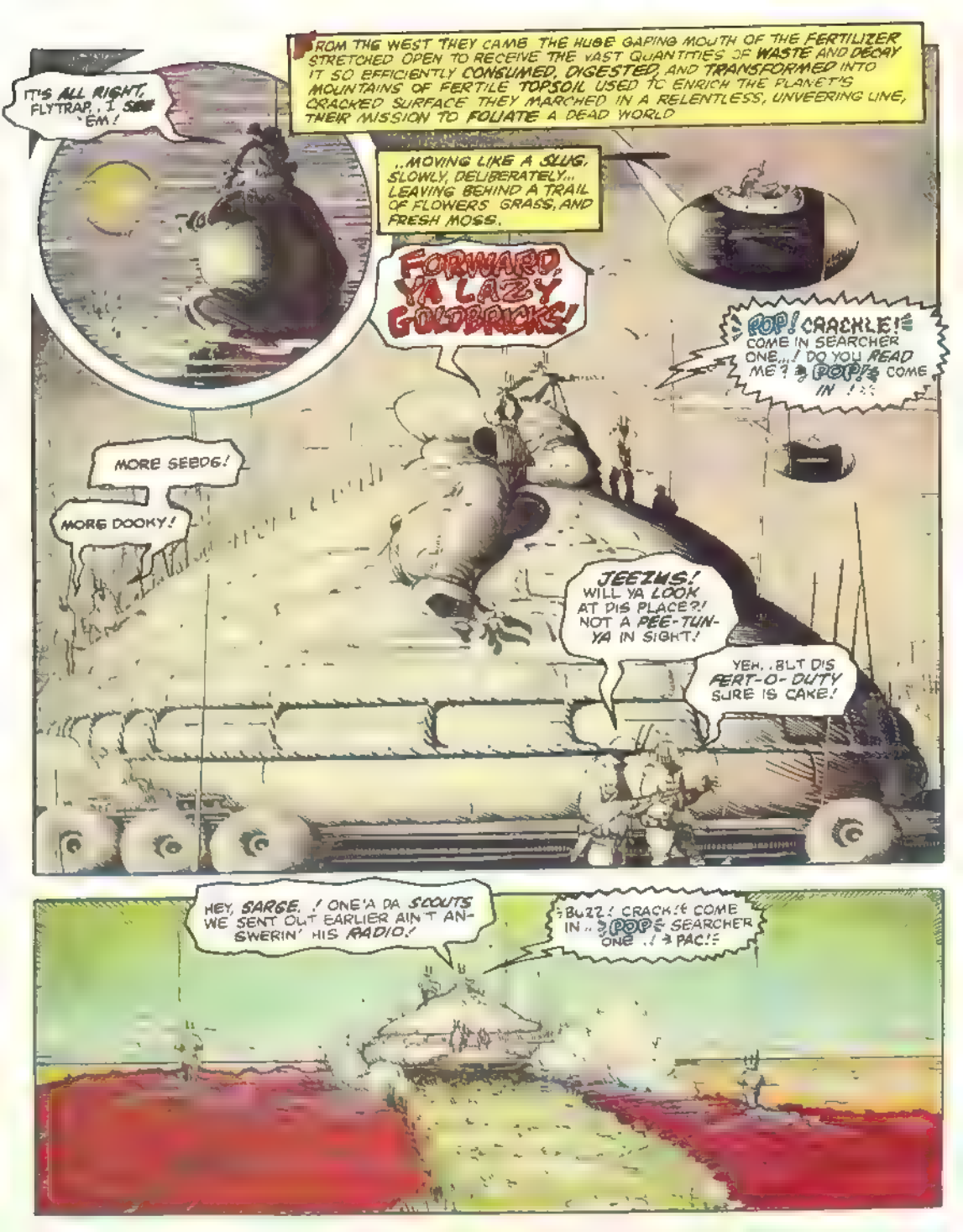
THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF MARCH OF THE HOLLY N' FLYTRAP!

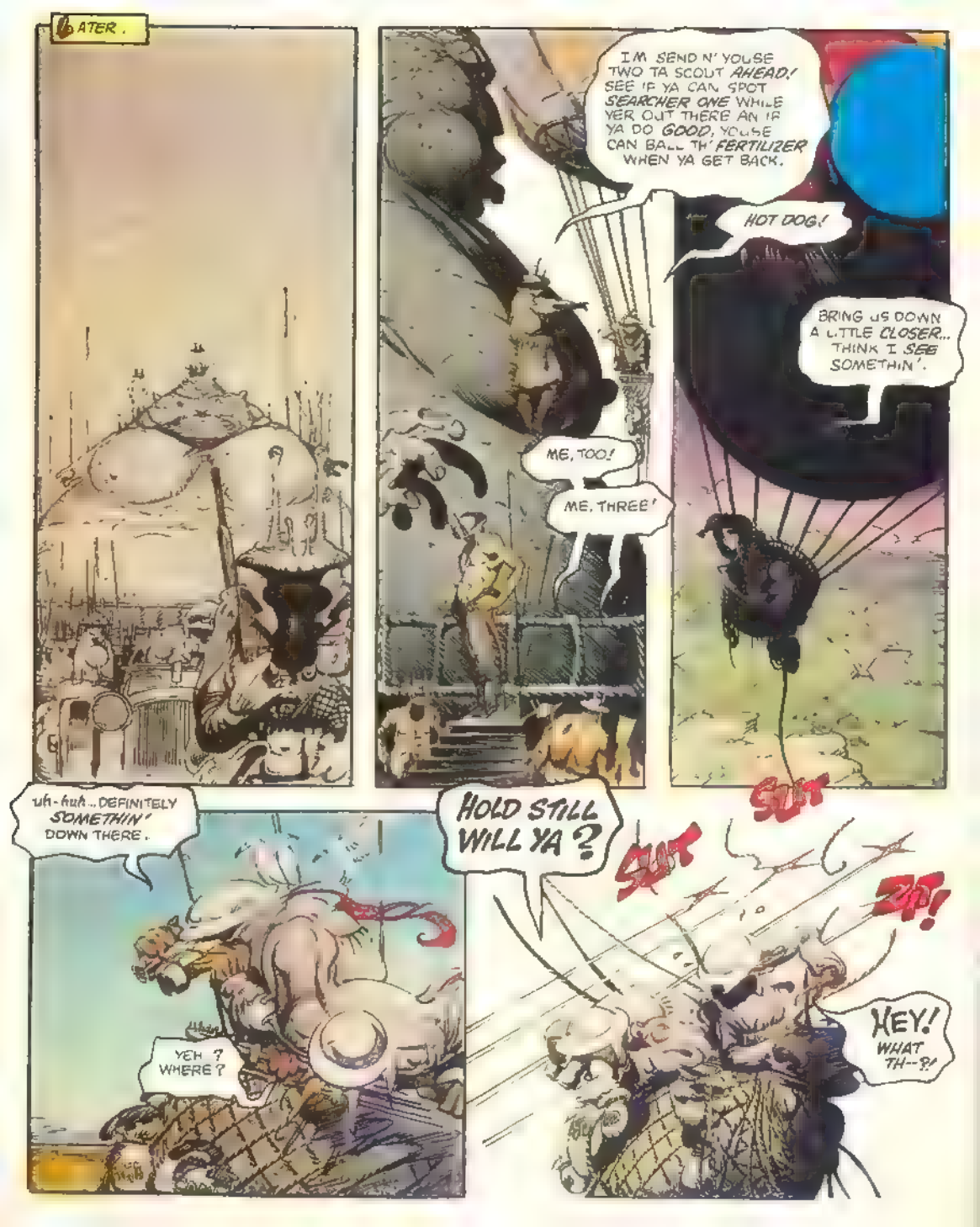
AH!
SWEET PLASMA PERFUME!
DRIP..! PLIP..! PLOP..!
DANCE YOUR DANCE, CRIMSON OOZE! DANCE IN CELEBRATION OF LIFE NO MORE! SEEP DOWN..DOWN..TO ANXIOUS PARCHED LIPS OF HUNGRY MOTHER EARTH!
YUK!

THE RITES OF SPRING

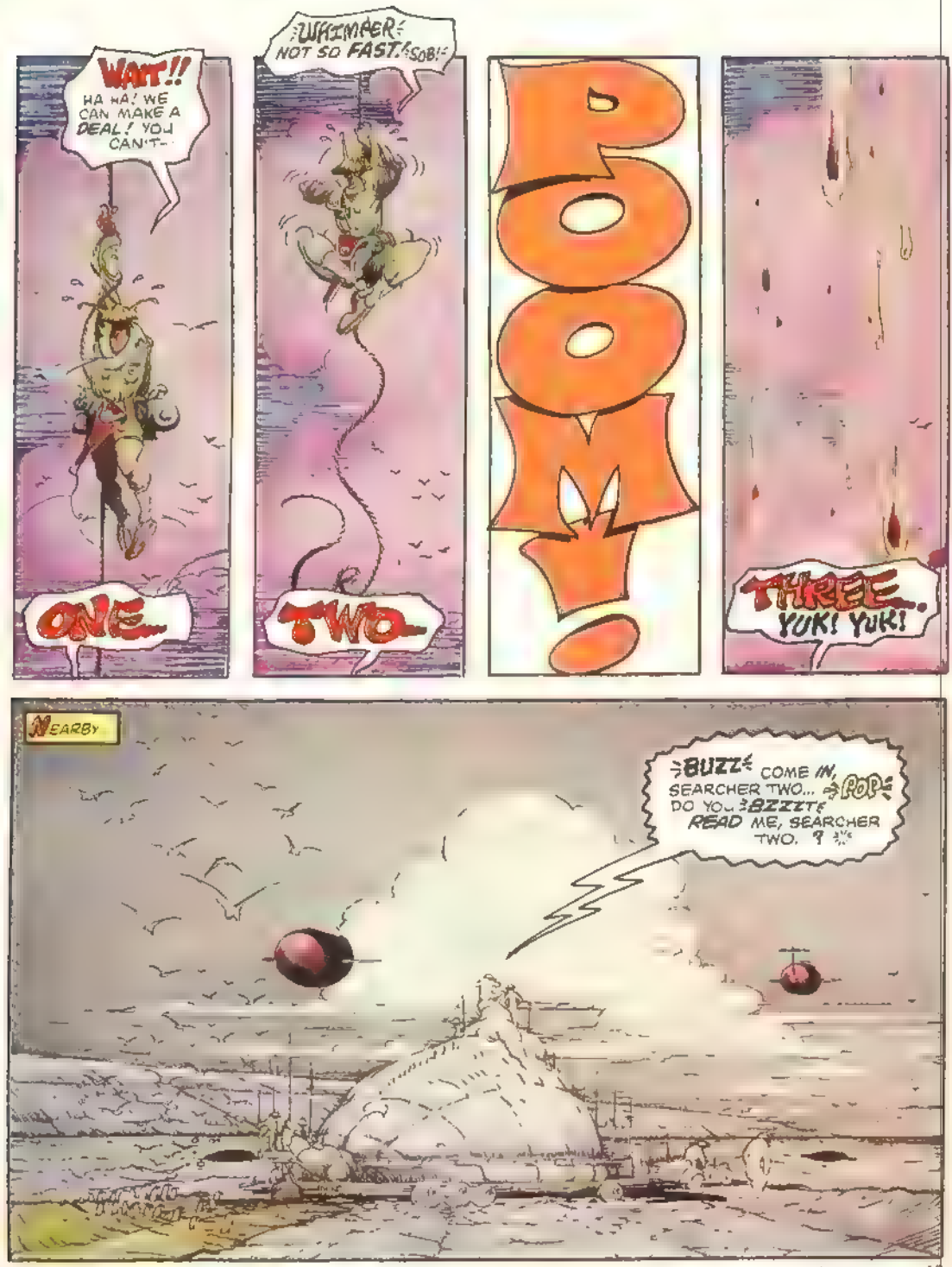





IT'S ALL RIGHT, FLYTRAP, I SEE 'EM!
FROM THE WEST THEY CAME THE HUGE GAPING MOUTH OF THE FERTILIZER STRETCHED OPEN TO RECEIVE THE VAST QUANTITIES OF WASTE AND DECAY IT SO EFFICIENTLY CONSUMED, DIGESTED, AND TRANSFORMED INTO MOUNTAINS OF FERTILE TOPSOIL USED TO ENRICH THE PLANET'S CRACKED SURFACE THEY MARCHED IN A RELENTLESS, UNVEERING LINE, THEIR MISSION TO FOLIATE A DEAD WORLD
..MOVING LIKE A SLUG, SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY... LEAVING BEHIND A TRAIL OF FLOWERS GRASS, AND FRESH MOSS.
FORWARD, YA LAZY GOLDBRICKS!
POP! CRACKLE! COME IN SEARCHER ONE...! DO YOU READ ME? POP! COME IN!
MORE SEEDS!
MORE DOOKY!
JEEZUS! WILL YA LOOK AT DIS PLACE?! NOT A PEE-TUN-YA IN SIGHT!
YEH.. BUT DIS FERT-O-DUTY SURE IS CAKE!
HEY, SARGE..! ONE'A DA SCOUTS WE SENT OUT EARLIER AIN'T ANSWERIN' HIS RADIO!
BUZZ! CRACK! COME IN.. POP! SEARCHER ONE..! PAC!


LATER.
I'M SEND N' YOUSE TWO TA SCOUT AHEAD! SEE IF YA CAN SPOT SEARCHER ONE WHILE YER OUT THERE AN IF YA DO GOOD, YOUSE CAN BALL TH' FERTILIZER WHEN YA GET BACK.
HOT DOG!
BRING US DOWN A LITTLE CLOSER... THINK I SEE SOMETHIN'.
ME, TOO!
ME, THREE!
uh-huh... DEFINITELY SOMETHIN' DOWN THERE.
YEH ? WHERE ?
HOLD STILL WILL YA ?
SUK
SUK
ZIP!
HEY! WHAT TH--?!

SUPERB FLYTRAP!
NOW WATCH THIS! YUK!
... AN' GOD BLESS LITTLE RALPHIE N' SUZIE AN...
BULL'S EYE!
KLIK!
PJOOM!
AAIEEEEE!!
WELLLLLL NOW.. WHAT WE GOT HERE, FLYTRAP?
PLEASE!! SOB NO KILL THIS ONE! Whimpers NO KILL!
TELL YA WHAT, GOOK, YOU CLIMB THAT ROPE BEFORE I COUNT T' THREE... I'M GONNA LET YA KEEP YER SLIMY GOOK SKIN!



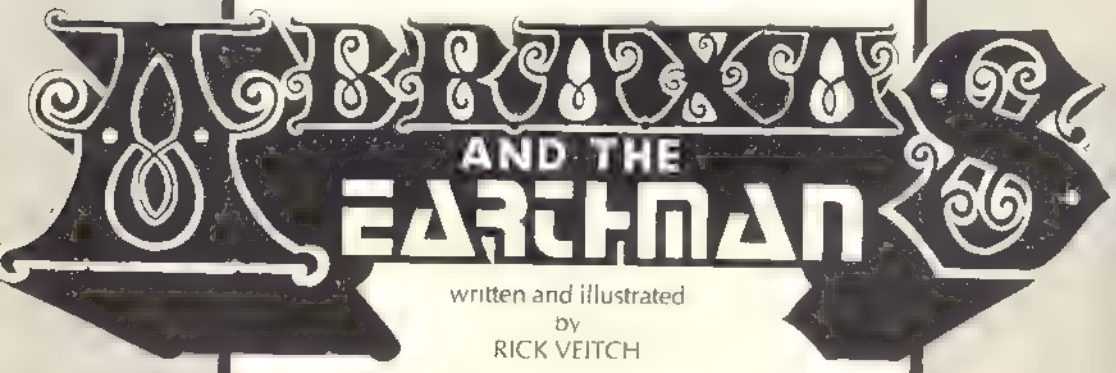
continues on page 67

SYNOPSIS

Two earthmen—marine biologist *John Isaac* and submarine commander *Falco*—have been shanghaied by a spaceshipful of aliens who hunt whales across the reaches of space.

To prepare the prisoners for duty aboard his strange, treelike vessel *Captain Rotwang* turns them over to his ship's surgeons, enormous insects known as the *Xlexu*. The Xlexu strip Isaac of his skin, replacing it with a transparent membrane suited to the atmosphere within which he must now work. In addition, they have tampered with his mind, joining the two halves of his brain, which are separate in most humans, and giving him the ability to generate and release, but not control, an immensely powerful *aura*. Falco has been decapitated, his body set in robotlike motion tending the ship's furnaces, while his intellect and emotions remain trapped in his disembodied head.

Isaac accepts a devil's bargain which Rotwang offers him, agreeing to aid in the hunting and killing of whales—especially *Abraxas*, the great whale Rotwang hates above all others—in payment for his own and Falco's full restoration and eventual return to earth. Bewildered and sickened by the job he has taken on, Isaac turns for comfort to another product of the Xlexu skill, the leopard/woman known as *Sphinx*.



written and illustrated
by
RICK VEITCH

CHAPTER FOUR

LAST SUPPER

PROPELLED BY THE SOFT KISS OF THE SOLAR WIND, HELD ALOFT BY HER GREAT GRAVITY FURNACES, THE PAN-GALACTIC WHALING SHIP ***YORRIKKE*** SLIPS THROUGH THE DARKENING SKIES OF THE ***WHALE PLANET***...

STRAIGHT INTO THE TEETH OF AN APPROACHING STORM FRONT SHE SAILS...

DIRECTED, AS IF BY UNSEEN HANDS, TO AN ***UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER!***

SHIP HO!

I RECOGNIZE HER. SHE'S THE ***YMIR***, UNDER THE FIRM HAND OF ***CAPTAIN DOLPHIN***, OUT OF KALIGHOUL. JUST TWO YEARS BEFORE US!

SHE'S BEEN BADLY ***MAULED*** CAP'N ROTWANG!

HO, DOLPHIN! YOU'LL ***NEVER*** MAKE LIGHT SPEED WITH ***THOSE*** SHREDDED SAILS! YE'RE WELCOME TO COME WITH US, BUT ***HAVE NOTICE***--WE'RE IN PURSUIT OF HIS MAJESTY, ***ABRAXAS!***

NINE SHIPS HE'S FEASTED ON, THIS SEASON ALONE..

AND ***STILL*** YE HUNT HIM?

©1982 VEITCH

©1982 Rick Veitch

I HAVE SWORN AN INVIOLABLE OATH THAT THE RED WHALE'S HORNS SHALL HANG FROM THESE YARDARMS, AND HANG THEY SHALL!
HAVE YE ENCOUNTERED HIM?
OH, YES...
IN FACT HE AND I MADE A BARGAIN, WE DID!
I GAVE HIM ALL ME WHALEBOATS AND TWO-SCORE GOOD MEN...
AND HE LEFT ME HALF A SHIP AND HALF A BODY TO FLOP ABOUT WITH!
SO LEAVE US!
WE'LL TAKE SLOW DEATH IN THE VOID BEFORE YOU'LL SEE US FLY INTO THOSE TERRIBLE JAWS AGAIN!
LOOK WELL, DOLPHIN! HERE IN MY HAND DO I HOLD HIS DEATH!
TEMPERED IN BLOOD THIS BARB AND I'LL TEMPER IT DOUBLY WHEN IT BURSTS HIS GREAT HEART!
THEN YE BEST KEEP A WEATHER EYE PEELED FOR HIM, ROTWANG...
HE'LL NOT GIVE YE MORE THAN ONE CHANCE--
...IF THAT EVEN...
I FEAR THE HARPOON IS NOT YET FORGED THAT WILL BRING HIM DOWN.
SO MAY AMMA HAVE MERCY ON ALL YER SOULS...

HELL AND DAMNATION! THE DEMON HAS SWALLOWED DOLPHIN'S SPIRIT AS WELL AS HIS LIMBS!
MAKE YE NO MISTAKE--ROTWANG'S SPIRIT STILL ABIDES WITHIN, ALBEIT SCREAMING FOR VENGEANCE!
HE SURE CAN BE CRUEL, CAN'T HE, KITTEN?
WHAT A THING TO WAKE UP TO!
WHAT'S HIS PROBLEM ANYWAY, SPHINX?
IT TAKES A SPECIAL TYPE OF MAN TO HELM A SHIP AND CREW ACROSS THE GALAXY FOR A WHALE HUNT!
ROTWANG HAS ALL THE NEEDED QUALITIES-- TO THE EXTREME!
PARDON ME IF I REMAIN UNIMPRESSED, BUT AFTER WHAT HE ORDERED DONE TO FALCO AND ME..
DON'T FEEL TOO SORRY FOR YOURSELF, KITTEN... MOST OF US HERE HAVE BEEN ALTERED BY THE XLEXU, IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE US FIT FOR DUTY IN THE VOID!
TAKE ME FOR INSTANCE! MY KIND HAVE BEEN BRED BY THE XLEXU JUST TO SERVE IN THE HIGH BRANCHES OF THE WHALERS WHERE THE TWO-LEGGER'S CAN'T GO!
THE XLEXU'S SURGICAL TALENTS ARE REALLY THE BACKBONE OF THE FLEET!
BUT WHAT'S THIS I HEAR THEY'VE DONE TO YOUR BRAIN?
I THINK THEY'VE CONNECTED MY BRAIN'S TWO HEMISPHERES INTO ONE UNIT! NOW I'M ABLE TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE WHALES WITH MY THOUGHTS!
...AND OLD ROTWANG'S GOT BIG PLANS FOR YOU, I BET!
HEY, EARTHMAN! THE CAPTAIN WANTS YOU IN HIS CABIN FOR DINNER!
YEAH-- IT LOOKS LIKE HE DOES!
WALK WITH ME, SPHINX-- I COULD USE SOMEBODY TO TALK TO.
SURE, KITTEN... I ALWAYS WAS A PUSHOVER FOR A GUY WHO NEEDED A LITTLE COMPANY...

I HAVE A VERY BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS ABRAXAS BUSINESS...
DON'T WE ALL! THE CREW IS PETRIFIED!
THEY DON'T KNOW IF THEY'RE FACING A WHALE OR SOME FIGMENT OF ROTWANG'S RABID IMAGINATION!
IT'S A WHALE ALL RIGHT! BUT SOME SORT OF MUTANT I THINK! THE SONG HE SINGS IS PAIN-WRACKED-- TORMENTED!
AND THE WEIRDEST PART OF ALL IS HE SEEMED TO RECOGNIZE ME! IS SUCH A THING POSSIBLE?
KITTEN,, WITH THE XLEXU AND THEIR SPECIES MANIPULATION, YOU'VE GOT TO BE READY FOR ANYTHING!
A RACE OF INSECTS ACTING AS AGENTS FOR EVOLUTION-- FASCINATING!
WHATEVER YOU CALL IT-- IT WORKS! WILL YOU BE COMING BACK UP TO THE NEST AFTER DINNER...?
SPHINX-- YOU'RE A GODSEND! THE XLEXU THEMSELVES COULDN'T KEEP ME AWAY!
AVAST! OUR GUEST OF HONOR HAS ARRIVED!
COME SIT BY ME, MR. ISAAC! YER ABOUT TO TASTE THE FINEST SUCCULENT IN SEVEN GALAXIES!
BUT FIRST A TOAST TO OUR NEWEST CREWMAN!
FALCO! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YOU BET, ISAAC, NOW THAT YOU'VE DECIDED TO WORK FOR ROTWANG!
YOU'LL SEE-- EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE OK!

EH, SHUT YER BLOODY SWEAR-HOLE!
TAKE A SLUG OF THIS, EARTHMAN -- IT'S GOOD FOR WHAT AILS YE!
HEY! DON'T HIT HIM LIKE THAT!
OW!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR NO MORE OF THAT INSOLENT LIP! DRINK IF YE VALUE THIS SKIN TIED ROUND YER NECK! HAR HAR!
HMMPH.
KAK!
THIS IS WHALE BLOOD!
OF COURSE. AND FRESH FROM OUR FIRST KILL!
AAAH! HERE'S THE GIBLET, AND DONE TO A FINE TURN, LOOK SHARP, MR. ISAAC. THIS DELICACY IS IN MUCH DEMAND ON CERTAIN PLANETS!
IN FACT, LEGEND HAS IT AS NO ORDINARY MORSEL, BUT THE VERY SOUL OF THE WHALE!
'ERE YE GO, EAT UP NOW!
IT IS ISAAC'S SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY THAT FINALLY OVERCOMES HIS DEEP NATURAL REVULSION.
GOOD! GOOD! NOW THESE XLEXU WITCH DOCTORS TELL ME THIS WILL WORK LIKE A CATALYST ON YER ALTERED BRAINS! SORT OF GIVE 'EM A LITTLE JOLT TO GET 'EM GOIN' IN GOOD SHAPE!
AND WE WANT THAT WONDERFUL BRAIN GOING FULL BLAST SO'S IT'LL FIND US ABRAXAS!
CHEW DAMN YE..
I-I'M GETTING FUZZY... NUMB..
THIS STUFF IS ACTING LIKE A DRUG ON ME..

AS A SCIENTIST I'M NOT UNFAMILIAR WITH THE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN MIND ALTERING DRUGS...
EAT, DAMN YER EYES!
...I CAN HANDLE .. THIS...
EAT!
..NO PROB..
AS ISAAC'S CONCIOUSNESS IS SWAMPED BY THE POTENT DRUG, AN INSTINCTIVE REACTION S TRIGGERED WITHIN HIM.
HE'S ALL LIT UP!
JUST LIKE HE DONE AT THE INITIATION!
ONLY THIS TIME, WHATEVER IT IS, IS BREAKIN' FREE!
IT MAKES A MAN FEEL WEIRD IN HIS SOCKETS...
WHAT DOES IT MEAN, XLEXU?
WHERE IS IT GOING?
IT IS HIS AURA, ROTWANG..
..AND IT IS GOING TO FIND ABRAXAS!

IT WILL LEAD THE WHALE BACK HERE TO YOU!
NOTHING CAN STOP IT NOW!
GOOD. THEN I'LL NOT HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THIS INSOLENCE ANY LONGER!
SLAY THE EARTHMAN!
YOU CAN'T DO THIS--YOU PROMISED!
IT ALL COMES BACK TO WHAT YE AND I WERE SAYING ABOUT PRINCIPLES... HOW SOME FOLKS HAS 'EM . AND OTHERS DON'T...
WELL... I DON'T!
HAVE DONE WITH IT, STAUB.
WHAT BLASPHEMY IS THIS?
THIS ONE MUST NOT DIE, ROTWANG!
KILL THE OTHER IF YOU WISH, BUT WE DEMAND THE LIFE OF ISAAC!
WHAT? YE DARE MAKE DEMANDS ON MY SHIPZ
YE KNOW HIS AURA WILL RETURN TO THAT SKINLESS BODY AND CAUSE ME NO END OF GRIEF!
I'M THE CAPTAIN HERE, AND I SAY HE DIES!
HIS DEATH WOULD REMOVE AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FROM A VERY IMPORTANT EXPERIMENT!
HE MUST LIVE AT ALL COSTS!
THEN IT'S MUTINY, AND YE'VE SEALED YER OWN FATES!
KILL 'EM, MATES!
BLOT 'EM ALL OUT!
WATCH IT! PLEASE-- OOWWW!

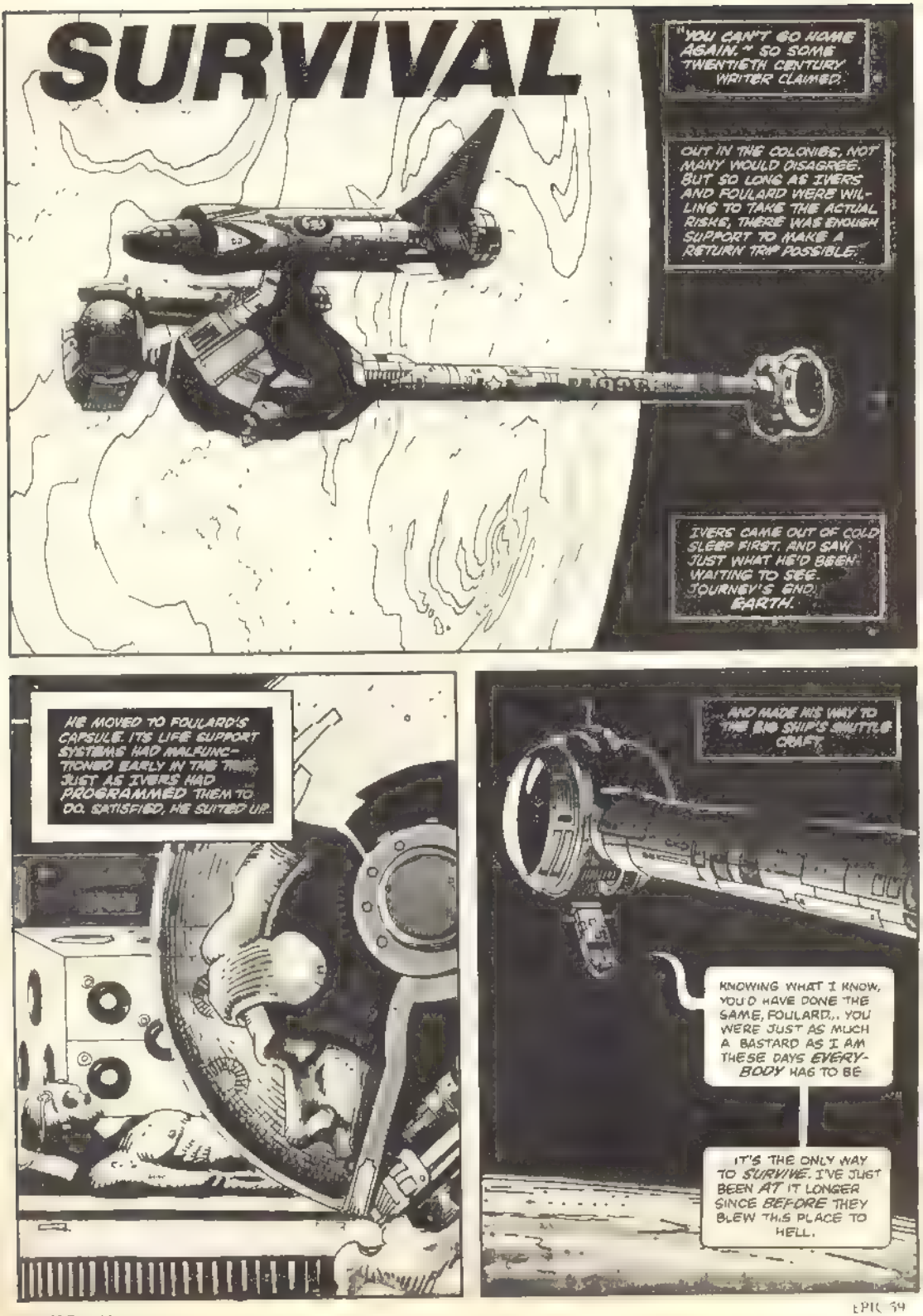
THE GAME IS UP, MY BROTHER! DELIVER THE EARTHMAN TO HIS DESTINATION!
MY LIFE IS FORFEIT TO THE GREAT EXPERIMENT!
SKEWER 'EM, YE SCURVY MAGGOTS!
TREACHEROUS INSECTS!
XLEXU SURGEONS HAVE SERVED FAITHFULLY ON EVERY WHALER SINCE THE FIRST ONE SHIPPED OUT OF KALIGHOUL!
WHY NOW THIS TREASON? WHY?
WHAT IN HELL...?
THE DYING XLEXU'S ANSWER COMES NOT IN WORDS..
...BUT IN A VISION!
A TANTALIZING VISION OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE XLEXU THAT HINTS AT THEIR TRUE MOTIVES...
...AND A DEVASTATING VISION OF SELF!

AS THE XLEXU DIES, THE VISION FADES BUT NOT SO ITS IMPACT!
CAN IT BE?
ARE THE WHALING SHIPS AND THEIR CAPTAINS MOVED ABOUT LIKE LITTLE PIECES ON A VAST XLEXU GAME BOARD?
WHALE HO!
IS ROTWANG'S UNCONTROLLABLE VENGEANCE ONLY PART OF SOME INSECT'S GREATER STRATEGY?
C-CAPTAIN! --L-LOOK!
HELLS BELLS!
IT IS ABRAXAS!

ABRAXAS & THE EARTHMAN continues next issue

TOPAZ

damn


SURVIVAL
"YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN." SO SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY WRITER CLAIMED.
OUT IN THE COLONIES, NOT MANY WOULD DISAGREE. BUT SO LONG AS IVERS AND FOULARD WERE WILLING TO TAKE THE ACTUAL RISKS, THERE WAS ENOUGH SUPPORT TO MAKE A RETURN TRIP POSSIBLE.
IVERS CAME OUT OF COLD SLEEP FIRST, AND SAW JUST WHAT HE'D BEEN WAITING TO SEE. JOURNEY'S END. EARTH.
HE MOVED TO FOULARD'S CAPSULE. ITS LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS HAD MALFUNCTIONED EARLY IN THE TRIP, JUST AS IVERS HAD PROGRAMMED THEM TO DO. SATISFIED, HE SUITED UP.
...AND MADE HIS WAY TO THE BIG SHIP'S SHUTTLE CRAFT.
KNOWING WHAT I KNOW, YOU'D HAVE DONE THE SAME, FOULARD... YOU WERE JUST AS MUCH A BASTARD AS I AM THESE DAYS EVERYBODY HAS TO BE
IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SURVIVE. I'VE JUST BEEN AT IT LONGER SINCE BEFORE THEY BLEW THIS PLACE TO HELL.

182 Pepe Moreno

"... BACK WHEN I WAS SHIFT OFFICER AT THE WEST ZONE'S ATLANTIC TWO UNDERGROUND STORAGE COMPLEX.

HUSTLE YOUR CREW, DURAN. WE'VE GOT A CONDITION YELLOW!

LAST LOAD JUST CAME INTO THE VAULT, IVERS. ENOUGH NUTRIENT BRICKS TO RESEED THE SAHARA!

DUNNO WHO'D SURVIVE TO USE 'EM IF THIS NU-CLEAR SABER RATTLING EVER WENT ALL THE WAY

"OF COURSE, NOBODY THOUGHT IT WOULD. BUT WHEN I TURNED FROM DURAN, THE BIG BOARD WAS LIT UP... RED. THIS TIME WAS FOR REAL! AND SUD-DENLY... I KNEW JUST WHAT TO DO!

"SURFACE LEVEL PERSONNEL WOULD ALREADY BE EVACUA-TING. DOWN BELOW, I WAS IN CHARGE. MY FINGERS MOVED. THE VAULT DOOR RUMBLED.

"DURAN AND THE OTHERS LOOKED UP WIDE-EYED FROM THE STACKED BRICKS OF ULTRA-DENSE NUTRIENT... TOO LATE.

IVERS! FOR GOD SAKE!!

EXIT

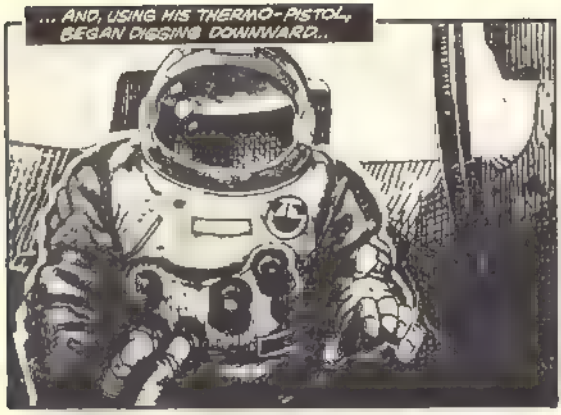
"I WAS ALREADY ON MY WAY WHEN ALL THEIR SCREAMS WERE SEALED OFF BY A GREAT HOLLOW KLANG, FOULARD."

IVERS SMILED. HE'D BEEN TALKING ALOUD STEADILY, THROUGH THE SHUT-TLE LANDING AND TAKING OUT THE TERRAIN ROVER, TALKING TO A DEAD MAN ORBITING SOMEWHERE UP BEYOND THE DUST-CLOGGED SKY.

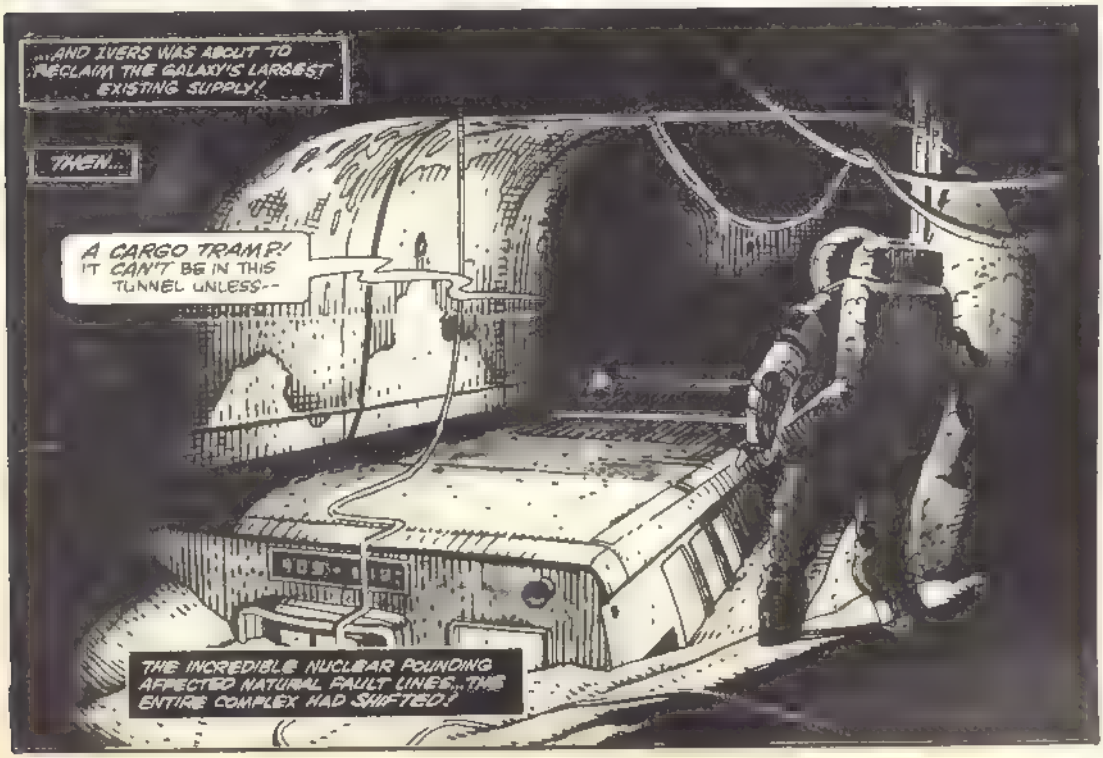
WHAT THE HELL FOULARD ..! MAYBE I KILLED YOU TOO SOON. AFTER ALL THAT TIME IN COLD SLEEP, A MAN NEEDS TO TALK.

AND, STILL SMILING, HE WENT RIGHT ON.
AT LEAST YOU DIED EASIER THAN DURAN AND HIS BUNCH, RIGHT FOULARD? THOSE VAULTS HAD AIR RECYCLING SYSTEMS... COULDN'T SUFFOCATE. HAD TO STARVE
FROM THE LOOKS OF IT, COULDN'T HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH BETTER UP HERE. TOOK NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS TO WORK UP THE NERVE, BUT ONCE THEY GOT DOWN TO IT, THE EAST AND WEST ZONES DID QUITE A JOB. A LOT MORE COMPLETE THAN EITHER SIDE EXPECTED
AND THEY NEVER KNEW THEY HAD HELP. THAT THE COLONIES WERE SICK OF FIGHTING TO SURVIVE WHILE SUPPORTING TWO TIRED, AGING POLITICAL SYSTEMS. AND PLANTED AGENTS ON BOTH SIDES TO PROD... TO PROVOKE... TO FINALLY BRING IT ON!
BUT YOU KNEW THAT, FOULARD. YOU WERE ONE OF THEM. AND CORRUPT ENOUGH YOURSELF TO ACCEPT A COUPLE OF NUTRIENT BRICKS I BROUGHT UP AS A BRIBE FOR TAKING ME OFF-WORLD WITH YOU.

YEAH WE'RE ALL BASTARDS BUT I'M GOING TO BE KING BASTARD, AS SOON AS--
WAIT A MINUTE. BY NOW, THERE SHOULD BE
GOT IT! THEY CAN BLAST AWAY MOST LANDMARKS AND EVERY LIVING SOUL
BUT THE CO-ORDINATES HAVEN'T CHANGED AND ONCE I'M THERE
"...I CAN FINETUNE THE TRACKER TO THE EXACT CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF THE NUTRIENT BRICKS. WITH THAT KIND OF MASS, THERE'S NO WAY I CAN'T PINPOINT THE VAULT...
WHATEVER'S HAPPENED UP HERE
GETTING OUT OF THE ROVER, IVERS DESCENDED INTO THE CRATER...

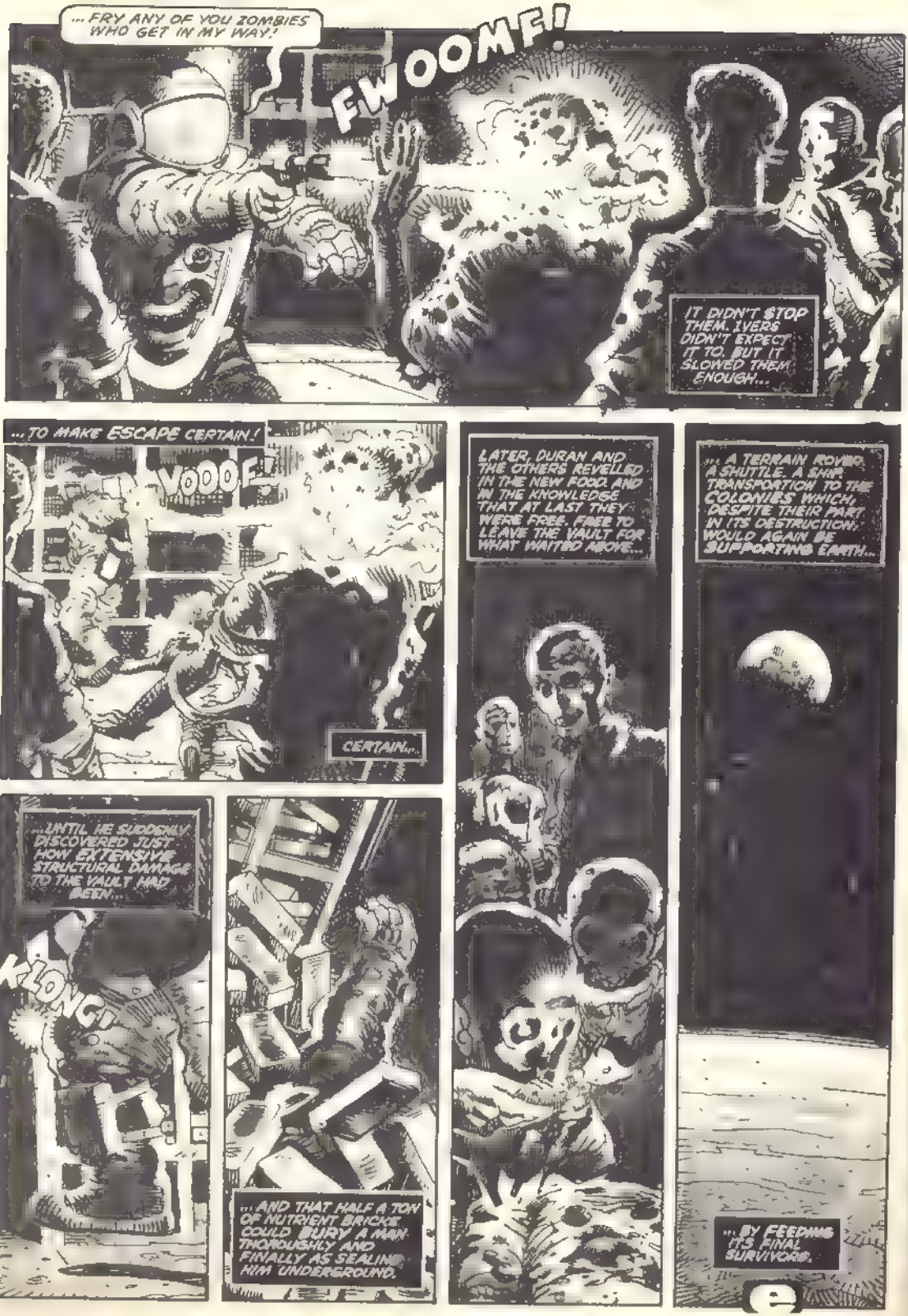


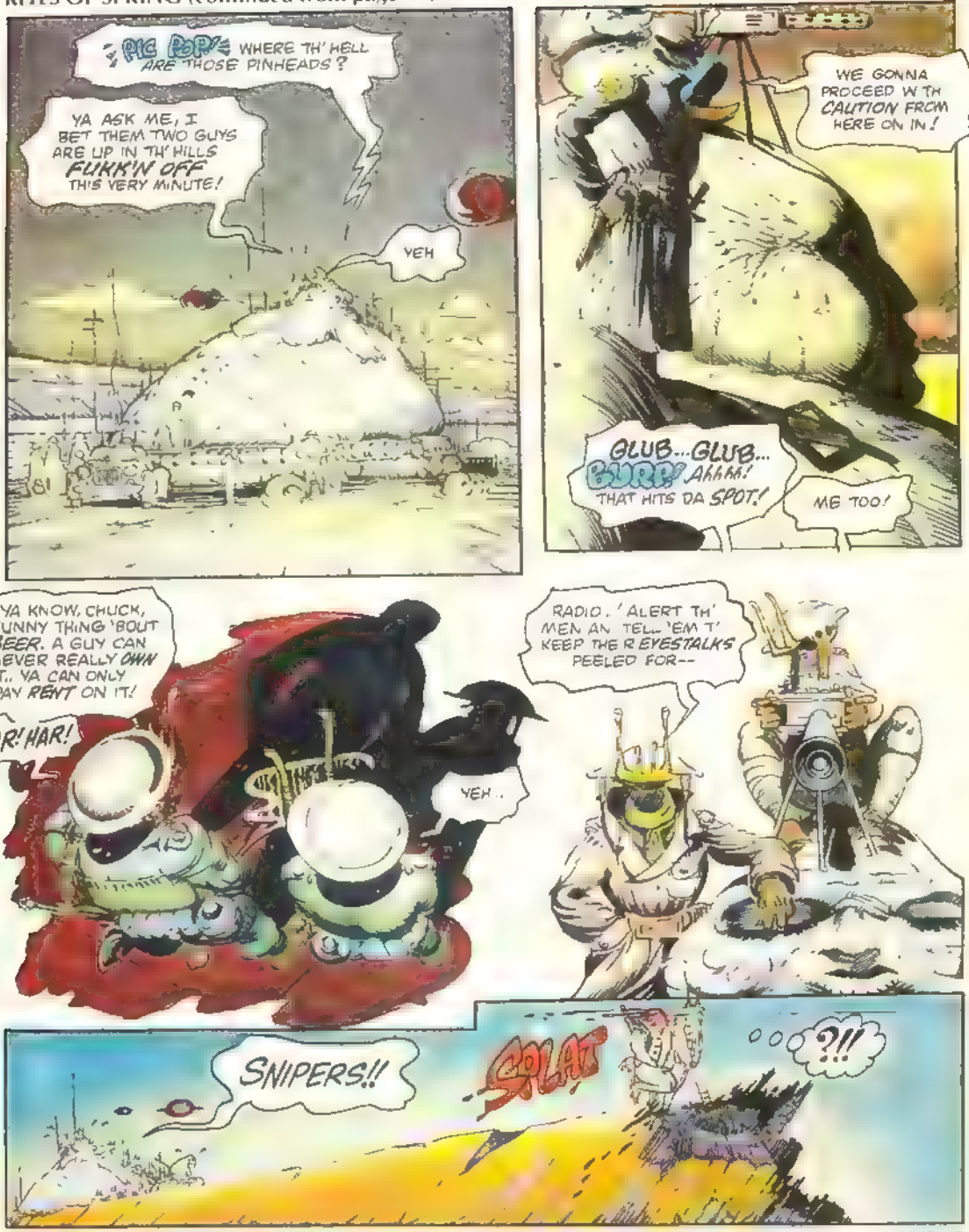
OUT IN THE COLONIES, WHERE ALIEN SOILS WERE LARGELY INFERTILE, NUTRIENT BRICKS OUTVALUED URANIUM, IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITY, THEY SPELLED THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBSISTING AND THRIVING...

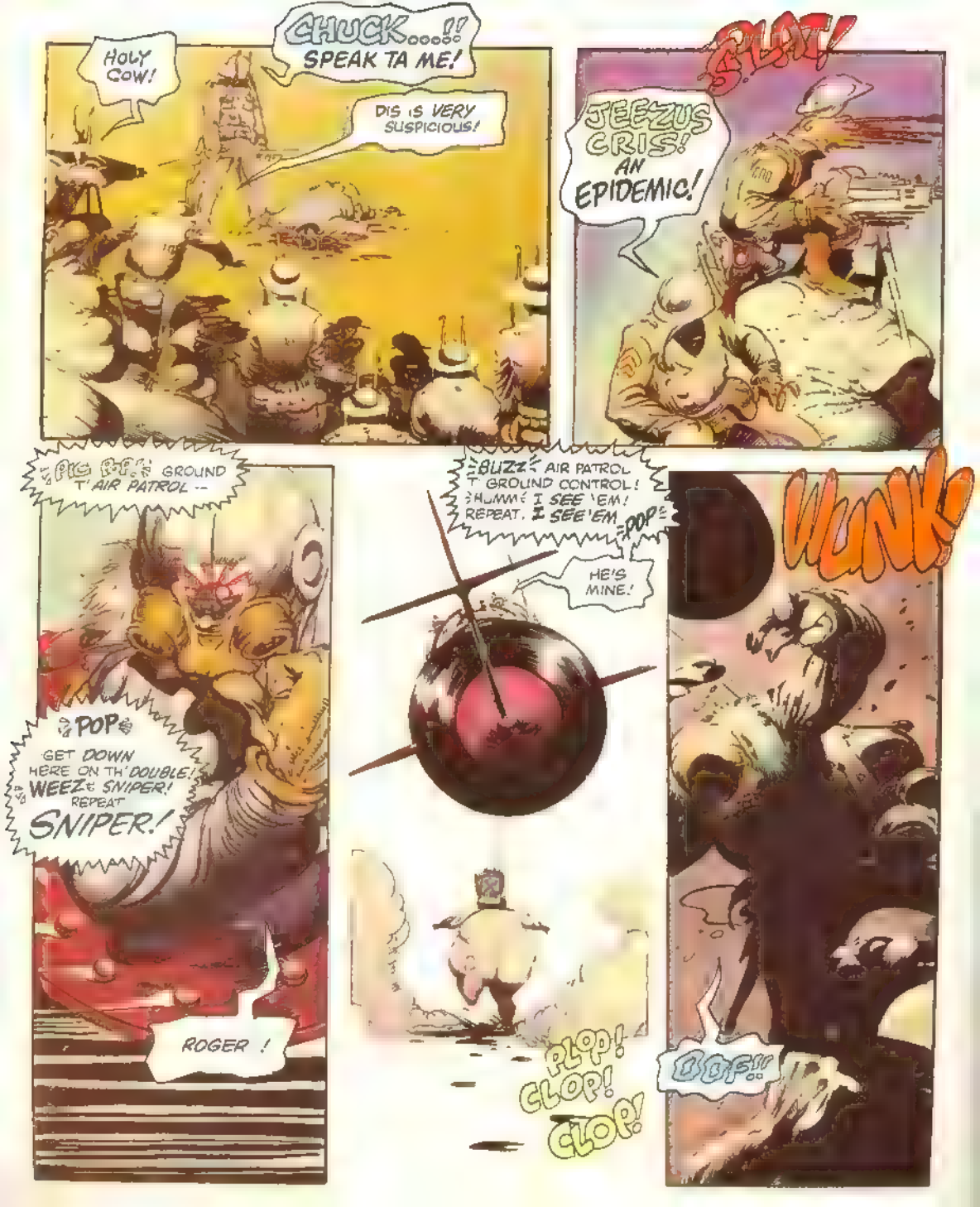

...AND IVERS WAS ABOUT TO RECLAIM THE GALAXY'S LARGEST EXISTING SUPPLY!
THEN...
A CARGO TRAMP! IT CAN'T BE IN THIS TUNNEL UNLESS--
THE INCREDIBLE NUCLEAR POUNDING AFFECTED NATURAL FAULT LINES...THE ENTIRE COMPLEX HAD SHIFTED!

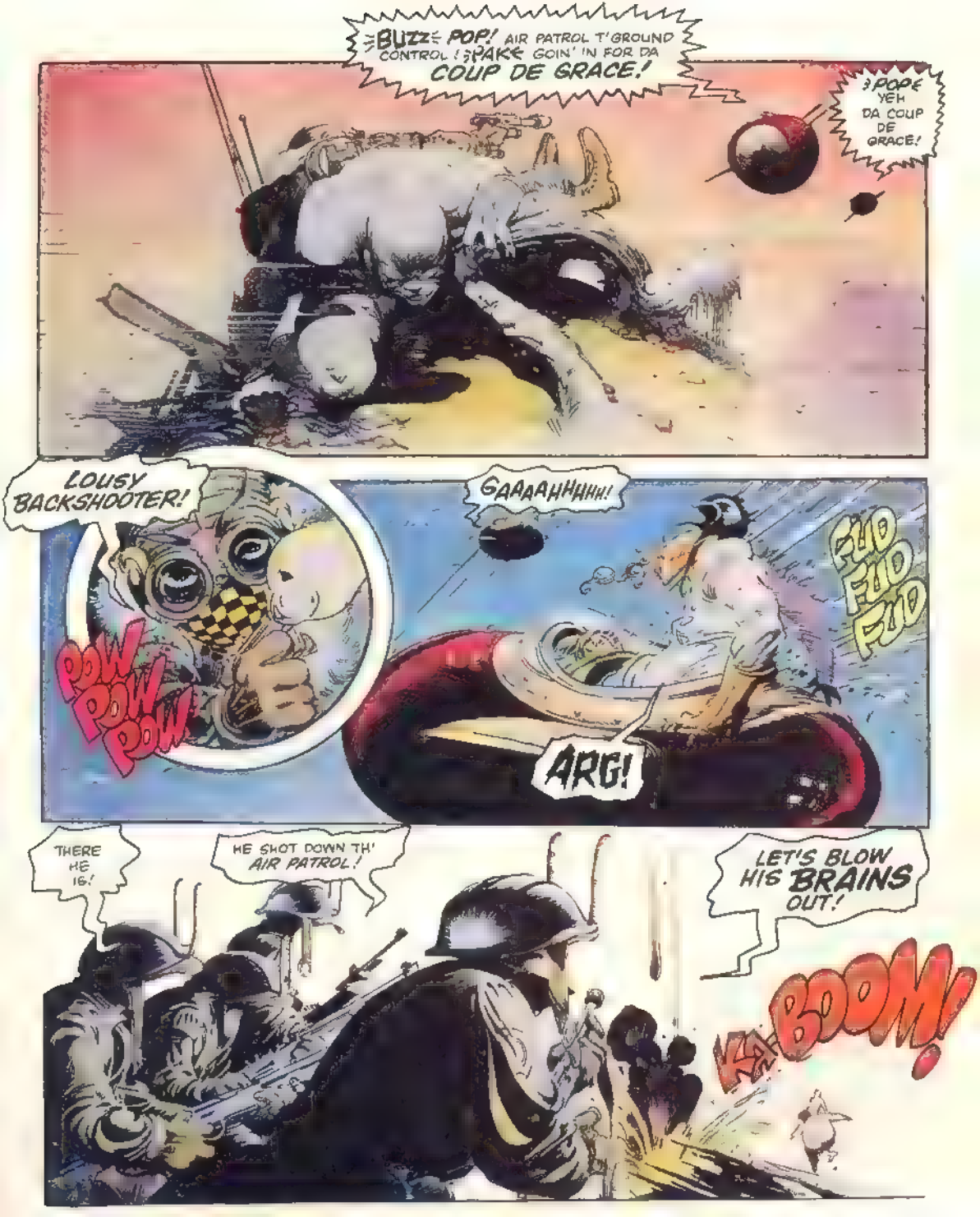
IVERS FELT A STEADILY MOUNTING SENSE OF PANIC.
TRAM CARS ARE FILLED WITH RADIOACTIVE ASH !
IF THE VAULTS HAVE CRACKED IF THE SAME THING HAPPENED THERE
THE NUTRIENT COMPOUNDS COULD HAVE BROKEN DOWN ! THE BRICKS DISSOLVED INTO NOTHING !
HE FOUGHT BACK THE THOUGHT, GIVING HIS WRIST-SCOPE ADJUSTED COMPUTATIONS...
...IVERS HOMED IN ONCE MORE ON HIS GOAL.
AND...
FINALLY... AND THE VAULT DOOR IS STILL INTACT. STILL SEALED! THERE'S A CHANCE...!
INSIDE HIS SUIT, IVERS' FINGERS WERE MOIST AS THEY SWIFTLY DIALED THE PROPER CODES.
THERE WAS AN INSTANT'S RESISTANCE. THEN...
AT LEAST SOME THINGS WERE BUILT TO LAST!
WITHIN, THERE WAS EVIDENCE OF STEADY RADIATION SEEPAGE AND STRUCTURAL DAMAGE...
...BUT ALL THAT WAS TRULY IMPORTANT HAD SURVIVED.
BE YEARS BEFORE ANY COLONY CAN HOPE TO PRODUCE SOMETHING OF THIS QUALITY OR QUANTITY
THEY'LL DEAL HELL. THEY'LL CUT EACH OTHER'S THROATS TO GIVE ME WHATEVER I WANT!
AND WHAT YOU DESERVE, IVERS?

W-WHO ?
BUT IVERS ALREADY KNEW... FELT IT LIKE AN ICICLE IN HIS HEART... EVEN BEFORE THEY SHUFFLED INTO VIEW FROM THE VAULT'S DARK RECESSES...
... EATING SOMETHING!
DURAN ? H-HOW ?
MANY OF US DIED WHEN THE COMPLEX SHIFTED IVERS WE BURIED THEM THE ONLY WAY WE COULD PILING NUTRIENT BRICKS OVER THEM
THEN THE RADIATION HIT US... AND IN T ME, STARVATION
UNT WE REA ZED THERE WAS FOOD IF WE WANTED TO SURVIVE BADLY ENOUGH TO EAT IT
AND MOST OF US DID, IVERS BECAUSE WE KNEW YOU WOULD BE BACK SO WE ATE OUR OWN DEAD. AND FOUND THE BR CKS' NUTRENTS HAD REACTED UPON THAT DECAYED FLESH ENRICHING IT
IT MORE THAN SUSTA NS US IT LETS US THRIVE AMID THE RADIAT ON!
WE COULD LIVE FOREVER, IVERS AS LONG AS WE KEEP F ND NG FOOD.
FOOD.
FOOD.
FOOD.
W-WAIT ! TRAPP NG YOU N HERE WAS AN ACCIDENT. ! I I CAME BACK TO RESCUE YOU. TO


...FRY ANY OF YOU ZOMBIES WHO GET IN MY WAY!
FWOOMF!
IT DIDN'T STOP THEM. IVERS DIDN'T EXPECT IT TO. BUT IT SLOWED THEM ENOUGH...
...TO MAKE ESCAPE CERTAIN!
VOOOF!
CERTAIN...
...UNTIL HE SUDDENLY DISCOVERED JUST HOW EXTENSIVE STRUCTURAL DAMAGE TO THE VAULT HAD BEEN...
KLONG!
...AND THAT HALF A TON OF NUTRIENT BRICKS COULD BURY A MAN THOROUGHLY AND FINALLY AS SEALING HIM UNDERGROUND.
LATER, DURAN AND THE OTHERS REVELLED IN THE NEW FOOD, AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT AT LAST THEY WERE FREE. FREE TO LEAVE THE VAULT FOR WHAT WAITED ABOVE...
...A TERRAIN ROVER, A SHUTTLE, A SHIP. TRANSPORTATION TO THE COLONIES WHICH, DESPITE THEIR PART IN ITS DESTRUCTION, WOULD AGAIN BE SUPPORTING EARTH...
...BY FEEDING IT'S FINAL SURVIVORS.


PIC POP'S WHERE TH' HELL ARE THOSE PINHEADS?
YA ASK ME, I BET THEM TWO GUYS ARE UP IN TH' HILLS FUKK'N OFF THIS VERY MINUTE!
YEH
WE GONNA PROCEED W TH CAUTION FROM HERE ON IN!
GLUB...GLUB... BURP! AHHH! THAT HITS DA SPOT!
ME TOO!
YA KNOW, CHUCK, FUNNY THING 'BOUT BEER. A GUY CAN NEVER REALLY OWN IT.. YA CAN ONLY PAY RENT ON IT!
HAR! HAR!
YEH..
RADIO. 'ALERT TH' MEN AN TEL 'EM T' KEEP THE R EYESTALKS PEELED FOR--
SNIPERS!!
SPLAT
?!!


HOLY COW!
CHUCK.....!! SPEAK TA ME!
DIS IS VERY SUSPICIOUS!
SLAT!
JEEZUS CRIS! AN EPIDEMIC!
-FIG BF- GROUND T' AIR PATROL --
-BUZZ- AIR PATROL T' GROUND CONTROL! -HUMM- I SEE 'EM! REPEAT, I SEE 'EM -POP-
HE'S MINE!
WUNK!
-POP-
GET DOWN HERE ON TH' DOUBLE! WEEZ SNIPER! REPEAT SNIPER!
ROGER !
PLOP! CLOP! CLOP!
OOF!!


BUZZ POP! AIR PATROL T'GROUND CONTROL! RAKE GOIN' IN FOR DA COUP DE GRACE!
POPE YEH DA COUP DE GRACE!
LOUSY BACKSHOOTER!
POW POW POW
GAAAAHHHHH!
FUD FUD FUD
ARG!
THERE HE IS!
HE SHOT DOWN TH' AIR PATROL!
LET'S BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT!
KA-BOOM!

CRACK! CRASH! POW! POP! POK!
KA-CHOW! KA-CHOW! KA-CHOW!
RIDE 'EM, DOGGIES!!
PLINT! PLINT! PLINT!
LOOP-DEE-LOOP!
PLINT! PLINT! PLINT!
ACK!
ERF!
FUD!
HUH
AUGH!
NO! PLEEE--
FUD! FUD!
YIIIIEEEEEEEEE!!
FUD! FUD! FUD! FUD! FUD!

CRIST!
WE'RE TH' ONLY ONES LEFT! ALL RIGHT, MEN... WE'RE GONNA SHIELD THE FERTILIZER WITH OUR VERY OWN BODIES... RIGHT?!
YEP!
UH-HUH!
DUCK!
OOPS.
RUN AWAY!
GYAAAA!
AHHHHH!
RUMP!

YUK!
WE'LL, I GUESS THAT'S THE LAST OF TH--
YA BE KNOWNST TO CHOLLY AND FLYTRAP IS THE DRIVER A HUGE UGLY BEAST SHORT ON BRAINS, LONG ON MUSCLE!
HA!
POW!
?!
YA! ME SQUISH LITTLE BUG MAN!! YA!
GASP MEBBE I CHOKE OVERLOOKED ONE!
RUN!
OOF!
BAP!

Uh...! NOW ME REALLY MAD! ME KILL YOU NOW!
CRACK
CHOP
GAK! SPUT! CAN'T BREATHE.. COUGH!
COUGH! huh..? HEY! WHA' ARG YOU LOOKIN' AT, FAT DEAD THING?
TURN YER UGLY FACE... I SAID!!!

..I SEE YOU.. A PORTRAIT OF LONELINESS.. OF ANGUISH.. OF DEATH
SHUDDUP!
..WE WERE THE CREATORS.. YOU ONLY DESTROY.. YOUR LIFE HAS NO PURPOSE..
JUS' SHUDDUP N' DIE!
YOU MOVE BREATHE. BUT THERE IS NO LIFE.
YOU ARE NOT A MAN.. I BET YOU GOT A TINY WEE-WEE...! ACK!
SHUDDUP! SHUDDUP! SHUDDUP! SHUDDUP!
PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA! PUN-TA!
TORRENT RAINS BEAT MERCILESSLY ON THE VALLEY. THE NEW LIFE, BORN OF THE FERTILIZER STRUGGLED BRAVELY AGAINST THE VIOLENT FLOODS THAT RIPPED AND CLAWED AT ITS VERY ROOTS
BLOW CRUEL WIND. DECAY BE YOUR FLAG
IN THE END THE FLOOD ENDURED WASHING THE TINY FLOWERS THE GREEN GRASS THE FRESH MOSS INTO A RIVER OF MUD THAT WOULD SOON HARDEN AND CRACK UNDER AN ANGRY SUN
SMOTHERING THEM FOREVER
DESOLATION YOUR SONG. DEATH YOUR REALITY. BLOW IN THE RITES OF SPRING, ON THIS PERFECT WORLD.

Long months the quest had lasted. From Spring to Summer to Fall. One by one, the knights of lesser resolve had fallen away as hardship and danger swelled, until but a handful of gallant Lords and loyal Squires remained. Now, as wind and rain took on the cold, cruel edge of Winter, even these faltered. Weary, heartsick with failure, their dedication broke. Among them, only Sir Tristam of Stonehelm hewed willfully to their vowed task, their sacred search for that which continued so agonizingly to elude them—

Art by MIKE SAENZ
Story by ARCHIE GOODWIN

GRAIL
YIELD, LAXTON! DON'T GIVE IN TO THE DEVIL'S MADNESS!
THE ONLY MADNESS IS TO KEEP HUNTING THAT WHICH DOESN'T EXIST!

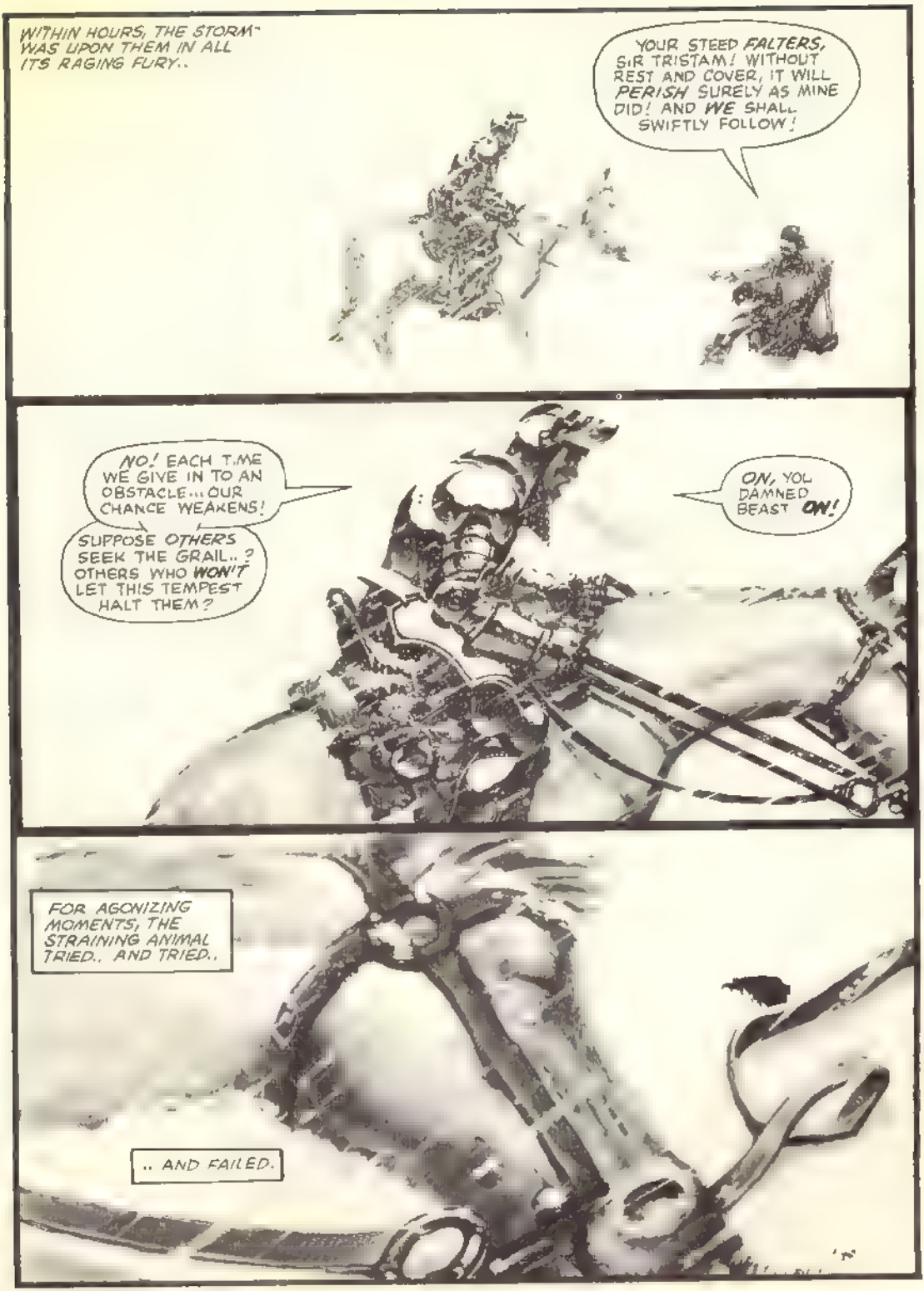
YOU ROB ME OF ALL CHOICE!
HAS IT COME TO THIS? I MUST SLAY ONE AMONG YOU TO HOLD THE REST TO THEIR KNIGHTLY OATHS?! THAT--
SIR TRISTAM!
.. YOUR WORDS ARE WASTED, I FEAR. WE COULD GIVE PURSUIT, BUT--
NO! IF LAXTON'S DEFEAT DIDN'T SHOW THEM WHERE RIGHT LIES... NOTHING WILL! PERHAPS IT WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE I ALONE WHO COMPLETES THE QUEST WHO--
SIRE!
IT FLOATED AMID THE TREES A SHIMMERING VISION, ALMOST SEEMING TO BECKON...
THE HORSES, GILES...! SWIFTLY. BEFORE IT VANISHES!

THEY RODE HARD THE IMAGE OF THE GRAIL FADING, REAPPEARING DRAWING THEM ON UNTIL
A VILLAGE LOOMED. AND WITH IT...
...THE RIPE STENCH OF PESTILENCE AND DEATH
CORPSES STACKED LIKE FIRE-WOOD, SIR TRISTAM... PLAGUE! EVEN THOSE IT DIDN'T CONSUME SEEM TO HAVE GONE MAD AND SLAIN EACH OTHER
SURELY THE OBJECT OF OUR QUEST CAN'T BE HERE, SQUIRE NOTHING SURVIVES! REMOUNT AND WE'LL--
HELP ME...! IF ANY ARE WITH-IN HEARING... SAVE ME PLEASE!
USE YOUR VOICE FOR PRAYER, WITCH..

I-I'M INNOCENT! MY ONLY CRIME IS TREATING THOSE CURSED BY THE SICKNESS!
...THE MOMENT IS AT HAND TO MAKE PAYMENT FOR THE EVIL YOU'VE WROUGHT!
HARLOT OF SATAN! YOU SOUGHT TO STEAL THEIR SOULS! THE SICKNESS IS YOUR MASTER'S WORK.. WHY ELSE WOULD YOU ESCAPE IT?!
IN THE NAME OF MERCY
THERE IS NONE FOR WITCHES! ONLY PURGING BY THE FLAME!
YOU'D BURN THE ONE TOUCH OF BEAUTY LEFT IN THIS PLAGUE-FOULED NEST...?
WROOK!
NO!

GILES!
HAS THE PLAGUE INFECTED YOU. OR THE SAME MADNESS WHICH OVERTOOK OUR COMRADES ON THIS JOURNEY? HOW CAN YOU TAINT OUR QUEST FOR THE GRAIL BY STRIKING A HOLY MAN?!
THE LEGENDARY AGE OF ARTHUR IS LONG PAST, BUT DARKNESS STILL ABOUNDS... THERE IS NEED TO REDISCOVER THAT SACRED OBJECT, TO RENEW OUR FAITH AND DIRECTION, AS THE GREATEST OF HIS KNIGHTS DID! ALL OTHER DEEDS PALE BESIDE THAT... AND I WILL NOT SEE SUCCESS DASHED BECAUSE YOU FORGET EVIL MAY WEAR A FAIR FACE!
IT MAY WEAR ANY FACE, SIR TRISTAM!
WE'VE SEEN DEATH ENOUGH THIS DAY, SIRE... DON'T MAKE ME DEFY YOU TO AVOID AN UNNECESSARY ONE!
YOU PRESS ME, GILES! BUT FOR YOUR PAST LOYALTY...
SIR KNIGHT PLEASE! HEED YOUR SQUIRE! OBSERVE THE PRIEST.
HE EXPIRES! THE DISEASE DROVE HIM TO FIX BLAME ON ME. THAT, AND THE FEAR THAT.
...IN MAKING HIS ROUNDS OF THE COUNTRY, HE BROUGHT THE PLAGUE HERE!
TRISTAN SHEATHED HIS BLADE, LETTING THE MATTER PASS, UNRESOLVED...

... AND RELUCTANTLY LET THE WOMAN LEAD THEM TO SHELTER AGAINST THE MOUNTING SNOW AND SWIFT FALL OF NIGHT.
ON GUARD, HE SLEPT FITFULLY, BUT FOUND LITTLE TO DISTURB HIM BEYOND THE NOISE OF THE WIND... AND THE MURMUR AND MOVEMENT OF TWO PEOPLE IN THE ACT OF LOVE.
WITH FIRST LIGHT, THE SNOW STILL FLEW
DON T GO! THIS STORM WILL WORSEN... LAST DAYS!
MY DUTY S WITH MY LORD DEDICAT ON TO THIS QUEST HAS MADE HIM RIGID...
. BUT THERE'S NO FINER WARRIOR! HE S SAVED MY LIFE IN COUNTLESS BATTLES! IF WE RIDE TO THE EARTH'S EDGE .. I MUST FOLLOW HIM!
OLTS DE, THE SKY WAS SLATE GRAY AND TREACHEROUS. SHE CALLED AFTER THE SQUIRE, BEGGING HIM TO RECONSIDER.
THE SOONER WE FIND THE GRAIL, THE SOONER I CAN RETURN. RETURN TO STAY!


WITHIN HOURS, THE STORM WAS UPON THEM IN ALL ITS RAGING FURY..
YOUR STEED FALTERS, SIR TRISTAM! WITHOUT REST AND COVER, IT WILL PERISH SURELY AS MINE DID! AND WE SHALL SWIFTLY FOLLOW!
NO! EACH TIME WE GIVE IN TO AN OBSTACLE... OUR CHANCE WEAKENS!
SUPPOSE OTHERS SEEK THE GRAIL..? OTHERS WHO WON'T LET THIS TEMPEST HALT THEM?
ON, YOU DAMNED BEAST ON!
FOR AGONIZING MOMENTS, THE STRAINING ANIMAL TRIED.. AND TRIED..
.. AND FAILED.

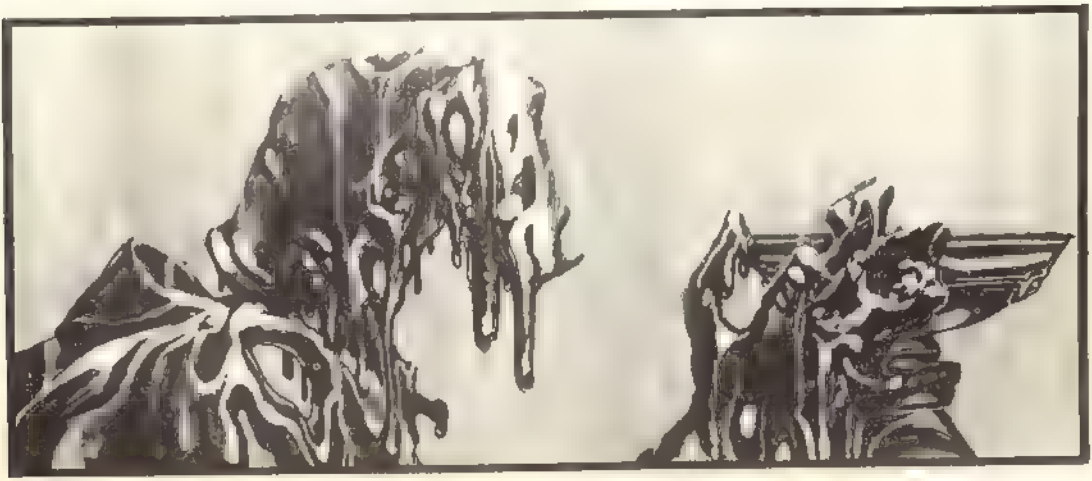
P-PERHAPS I SHOULDN T HAVE CURSED HIM, GILES.. CARRIED ME SINCE... THE CHARGE AT RAVENSCOURT. ALWAYS SO STRONG...
NOTH,NG S THE MATCH FOR TH S S-STORM, SIRE . ! SEEMS TO BE A CAVE IN THOSE ROCKS... IF WE CAN REACH IT..
WHAT... ?! COME BACK HERE. I COMMAND IT, SQUIRE. WE MUST GO ON! THIS S A TESTING TH S PROVES OUR WORTHINESS!
I WON'T HIDE IN A CAVE LIKE AN ANIMAL! THAT VILLAGE SORCERESS HAS TURNED YOU INTO A WEAKLING! I WON'T GIVE IN!
S-SIRE...! WE MUST TAKE COVER.. MUST! JUST TRY THE CAVE! JUST LOOK!
I JUST..

L-LIGHT...! I SEE LIGHT AT THE BACK OF THE CAVE, SIR TRISTAM...! I-IT'S..
H-HERE..!
I-IT'S HERE! THERE'S NO NEED TO GO FURTHER... TO FIGHT THE STORM..
COME TO THE CAVE, SIR TRISTAM! I'VE FOUND IT! I'VE FOUND IT!
ABOVE THE GROANING WIND, THE KNIGHT OF STONESHELM HEARD HIS SQUIRE'S HOARSE CRY. HEARD, AND SLOWLY MADE SENSE OF THE WILDLY SHOUTED WORDS.
FOUND THE GRAIL...! YOU'VE FOUND THE GRAIL...?

HE WHIRLED. AND DESPITE ARMOR AND STINGING, BLINDING SNOW... HE RAN TO THE CAVE... AND GILES
S-SIRE. W WHAT. ?
NOT YOU. . NOT YOU! IT'S MINE! I'M THE ONE WHO STAYED WITH THE QUEST... WHO NEVER SWERVED... WHO ALWAYS SACRIFICED.
I'M THE ONE!
THE ONLY ONE WHO DESERVES IT...
..THE ONLY ONE WHO WILL CLAIM T
AND BATHED IN ITS GREAT GLOW

AND HAVING SEIZED IT

...WAS CONSUMED BY IT!

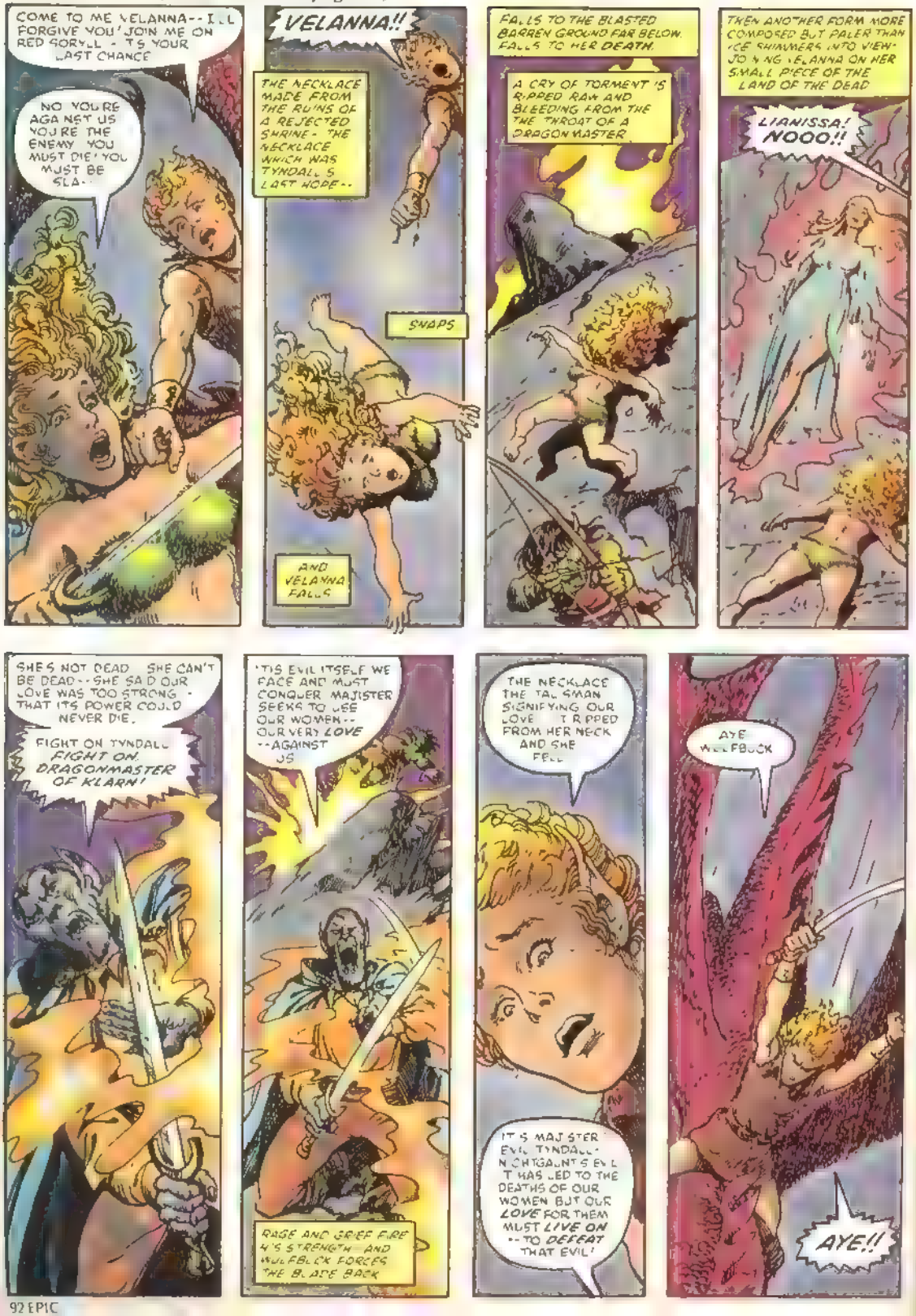


YOU WERE RIGHT TO CALL ME SORCERESS, SIR KNIGHT... AS WAS THE PRIEST TO CALL ME WITCH.
YET I NEVER USED MY POWERS TO HARM. EVEN THIS TRANSFORMATION WAS BUT TO LURE YOU TO SAFETY FROM THE STORM. YOUR OWN ACTIONS FORCED ME TO DO MORE!

THE WOMAN MOVED URGENTLY FORWARD TO THE CRUMPLED, BLEEDING FIGURE ON THE STONE FLOOR. GENTLY, SHE LIFTED HIS HEAD.

S-SAVED BY... WITCH-CRAFT! WAS IT... ALSO THAT WHICH BROUGHT US TO YOUR VILLAGE?
TO SAVE ME FROM THE STAKE...! I SENSED YOU NEARBY AND CONJURED THE GRAIL IMAGE TO BRING YOU.

SEEMINGLY DARK POWERS MAY STILL SERVE THE CAUSE OF GOOD, GILES.. AS THE NOBLEST QUEST CAN SOMETIMES CORRUPT
NOW REST, MY GENTLE SQUIRE. HEALING TAKES LONGER THAN DESTRUCTION. BUT WE HAVE SAFE SHELTER... AND EACH OTHER.


COME TO ME VELANNA-- I'LL FORGIVE YOU! JOIN ME ON RED SORYLL - 'TIS YOUR LAST CHANCE
NO! YOU'RE AGAINST US YOU'RE THE ENEMY YOU MUST DIE! YOU MUST BE SLA--
VELANNA!!
THE NECKLACE MADE FROM THE RUINS OF A REJECTED SHRINE - THE NECKLACE WHICH WAS TYNDALL'S LAST HOPE--
SNAPS
AND VELANNA FALLS
FALLS TO THE BLASTED BARREN GROUND FAR BELOW. FALLS TO HER DEATH.
A CRY OF TORMENT IS RIPPED RAW AND BLEEDING FROM THE THROAT OF A DRAGONMASTER
THEN ANOTHER FORM MORE COMPOSED BUT PALER THAN ICE SHIMMERS INTO VIEW- JOINING VELANNA ON HER SMALL PIECE OF THE LAND OF THE DEAD
LIANISSA! NOOO!!
SHE'S NOT DEAD SHE CAN'T BE DEAD-- SHE SAID OUR LOVE WAS TOO STRONG - THAT ITS POWER COULD NEVER DIE.
FIGHT ON TYNDALL FIGHT ON, DRAGONMASTER OF KLARN!
'TIS EVIL ITSELF WE FACE AND MUST CONQUER MAJISTER SEEKS TO USE OUR WOMEN-- OUR VERY LOVE --AGAINST US
RAGE AND GRIEF FIRE HIS STRENGTH AND WULFBLOCK FORCES THE BLADE BACK
THE NECKLACE THE TALISMAN SIGNIFYING OUR LOVE TORN FROM HER NECK AND SHE FELL
IT'S MAJISTER EVIL TYNDALL- NIGHTGAUNT'S EVIL THAT HAS LED TO THE DEATHS OF OUR WOMEN BUT OUR LOVE FOR THEM MUST LIVE ON --TO DEFEAT THAT EVIL!
AYE WULFBLOCK
AYE!!

NOW, SHREEKAR-- NOW, MIGHTY GOBLIN CHIEF-- ARE YOU READY TO FACE A *TRUE WARRIOR OF KLARN?* ARE YOU READY TO FIGHT A DRAGONMASTER WHO HAS JUST LOST ALL HE LIVED FOR-- AND WHO FEARS DEATH *NOT AT ALL?!*
THEN COME ON-- *COME ON!* MY BLADE THIRSTS FOR YOUR BLACK GOBLIN BLOOD!

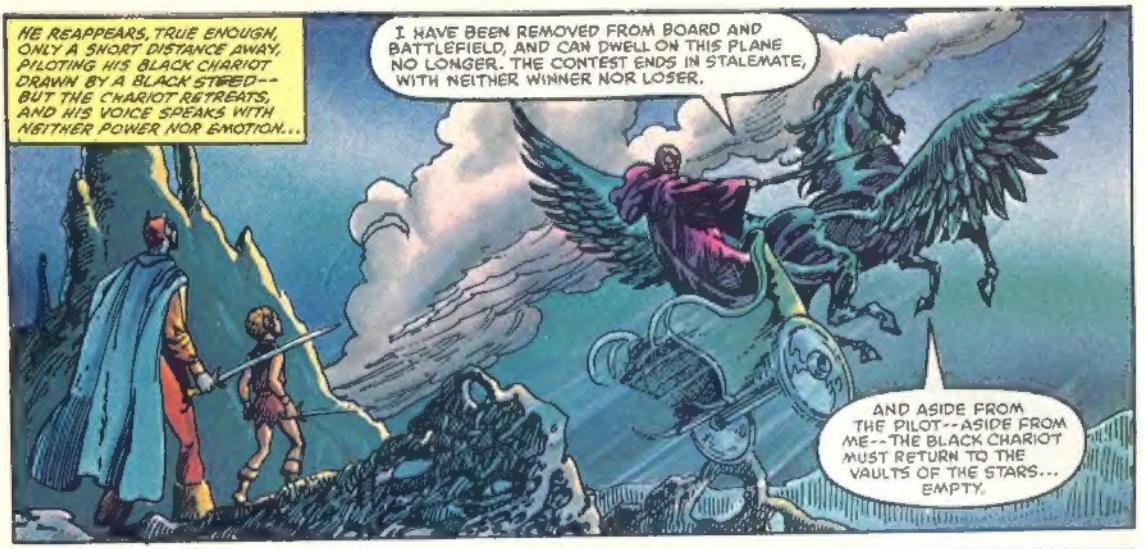
DO YOU HEAR THE LITTLE ONE, NIGHTGAUNT? YOU'VE DONE NOTHING BUT GIVE HIM STRENGTH--
--THE SAME STRENGTH WHICH COURSES THROUGH *MY* VEINS, AND WHICH HAS ALREADY PERMITTED ME TO BREAK THE SPELL OF BLACK KNOTS BINDING GLORYWAND!
NOW, IT WILL PERMIT ME TO BREAK *YOU!*
I'VE HARDLY FALLEN YET, BEAST-MAN.

DIE, SHREEKAR! *DIE,* GOBLIN CHIEF! AND *STAY* DEAD-- FOR ALL THE HOT-COLD SEASONS TO COME!
HEAR ME, DRAGONS! MASS FOR FINAL ATTACK-- AND *SCOUR* THIS LAND OF FILTH!

THE SHIELD HAS BEEN *PERVERTED,* NIGHTGAUNT-- AND CAN NEVER BE AS STRONG AS IT ONCE WAS! YOU HAVE ONLY YOURSELF TO BLAME!
NO, DAMN YOU! STAY BACK! THE SHIELD--
YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR IN UNDERESTIMATING US-- TRIVIALIZING THE POWER OF OUR *LOVE!*
MOST OF YOUR DEAD ARMY HAS ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED--

"--AND THE DRAGONS NOW MOVE TO *FINISH* THEM!"
INDEED--AFTER SLEEPING FOR SO LONG AND SO DEEPLY, THE KLARN DRAGONS HAVE UNTIL NOW ACTED IN SOMNOLENT RESTRAINT...
BUT THE STRONG WORDS AND STRONGER DEEDS OF THEIR NEW MASTER HAVE FULLY AWAKENED THEM-- AND THEY RESPOND WITH ALL THE ANCIENT FIRE AND FURY AT THEIR COMMAND.

WULFBUCK, TOO, COMES AWAKE-- AS DOES HIS GLORIOUS SWORD, ROUSED BY THE RAGE OF GRIEF COURSING FROM THE HAND OF ITS WIELDER.
A SINGLE, AWESOME SLASH-- AND BLACKNESS FALLS AWAY IN PIECES, FREEING THE FORMER CLEAR AND PURE SURFACE OF THE CRYSTAL SHIELD.
MAJISTER-NIGHTGAUNT STIFFENS IN AGONY.
HMM.
HMM, INDEED, MY DARK OPPONENT-- IT WAS LONG IN COMING. BUT AT LAST THE POWER OF MY PLAYERS MAKES ITSELF KNOWN--
--AND IT IS A RELIEF INDEED TO RID THE BOARD OF THIS BLACK PIECE.
NOOOOOOO
'TIS DONE, BEAST-MAN.
YOU HAVE LOST AND WON...WHILE I HAVE WON AND LOST.
AND, SO SAYING, BLACK MAJISTER-- LORD NIGHTGAUNT-- COMES APART IN A BLINDING BLOSSOM OF LIGHT.


HE REAPPEARS, TRUE ENOUGH, ONLY A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY, PILOTING HIS BLACK CHARIOT DRAWN BY A BLACK STEED--BUT THE CHARIOT RETREATS, AND HIS VOICE SPEAKS WITH NEITHER POWER NOR EMOTION...
I HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM BOARD AND BATTLEFIELD, AND CAN DWELL ON THIS PLANE NO LONGER. THE CONTEST ENDS IN STALEMATE, WITH NEITHER WINNER NOR LOSER.
AND ASIDE FROM THE PILOT--ASIDE FROM ME--THE BLACK CHARIOT MUST RETURN TO THE VAULTS OF THE STARS... EMPTY.

EPILOGUE:
MAJISTER WAS RIGHT, WULFBUCK ...WE WON...BUT THE CONTEST ENDS WITH NO WINNER.
AYE, AND THAT'S AS IT SHOULD BE ...BUT OUR LOVE DID NOT DIE, DRAGONMASTER, AND MAYHAP IT CAN YET CONQUER FALSE DEATHS.
F-FALSE--?

AYE--AND IF YOU WOULD JOIN ME IN SACRIFICE, FRIEND ELF, LAY YOUR HAND UPON THE SWORD...
GIVE YOUR LOVE TO GLORY-WAND AS LIANISSA DID, AND AS I DO NOW...

...AND LET THAT LOVE COURSE FROM THE BLADE--AND THROUGH THE CLEANSED CRYSTAL--TO THE OBJECTS OF OUR LOVE LYING BEYOND.
IN THAT MOMENT OF RELEASED LOVE--AND SACRIFICED POWER--THE SWORD DIES.

AND-- THE...THE POWER OF MY SOUL-SPRITES... AND OF GLORYWAND...AND SOME OTHER POWER...FILLS ME...BURNING AWAY THE RED MIST...
Y-YES... AND I... I WAS WRONG...
THEY DECEIVED ME--PERVERTED ME EVEN AS THEY PERVERTED THE CRYSTAL! TYNDALL IS NOT EVIL...

YOU, MURKANDOR... YOU ARE EVIL!
THE STATUE--IT SPEAKS!
AND EXPLODES.

YAAHHH
AND MURKANDOR FALLS THE LENGTH OF A VERY LONG SCREAM.

GLORYWAND IS NAUGHT BUT AN ORDINARY BLADE NOW, LIANISSA--YET NEVER WAS A SACRIFICE MORE WILLINGLY MADE. BUT MY...MY FACE...TRULY DOES NOT REPEL YOU?
HAD I LIED, WULFBUCK, ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN LOST THE MOMENT THE WORDS LEFT MY LIPS.
IT... IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK, VELANNA...
BUT...?
BUT...WELL, YOU'RE ALIVE AGAIN, AND ALMOST LIKE YOUR OLD SELF...

BUT I'M STILL DIFFERENT, TYN? YES... I SUPPOSE I AM. WHATEVER IT WAS THAT FILLED ME AND BLACKENED MY SOUL... HAS LEFT ITS MARK.
THE DRAGONS, VELANNA--THEY AWAKENED IT IN ME... AND NEITHER OF US, I SUSPECT, WILL EVER BE QUITE THE SAME. BUT DO YOU THINK WE CAN GROW TO LIKE EACH OTHER THIS WAY?
BUT LET'S HOPE I'M ONLY...MORE EXPERIENCED ...AND NOT TRULY CHANGED. BESIDES, YOU'RE HARDLY THE SAME--YOU SEEM TO HAVE GREATER STRENGTH...AUTHORITY...
WE'D BETTER, TYN, BECAUSE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER CAN NEVER BE BROKEN...NOT NOW.
EH--?! OVER THERE--THOSE BODIES!

THE GOBLIN-ZOMBIES! THEY'RE SHIFTING--MOVING!
ARE...ARE THEY COMING BACK TO LIFE AGAIN--?!!

NOPE.
UHN! PHYEW! LOUSY ZOMBIES!
JUST CUZ THEY DIED AGAIN, THEY DIDN'T HAVETA BURY ME.
SO WHAT'S UP? DID WE WIN YET--?

THEY LAUGH, AND IN THE LAUGHTER TENSION IS PURGED.
THEN TYNDALL SIMPLY SAYS, "YES"...
...AND WISHES HE COULD HURL THE SINGLE WORD A THOUSAND TIMES, ON WINGS, INTO THE FACE OF THE DAWNING SUN.